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Special Samburu double issue

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and the Bird Committee of the East Africa Natural History Society

Editors: Leon Bennun and Colin Jackson

Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

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Editorial

Welcome to the special Samburu double issue of *Kenya Birds*. Why a double issue? Well, it's a longish story — in essence, the Bird Committee has decided to move to publication dates in March and October (rather than June and December) for the magazine. This issue *should* have been out last October — combining the two issues for 1997, and putting us on track for volume 7(1) to appear in March 1998.

Well, it was a nice idea... As it turns out this double issue, despite its cover date, is rather more than six months late, and we apologise to all our (very patient) readers. There's a simple reason for this delay — the editors are overworked! Better late, we hope, than never; and we hope too that you will enjoy the wide variety of articles and notes together with Edwin Selempo's illustrations of Samburu birds. This issue covers news up to the end of 1997 and records up to but not including World Birdwatch '97 on 4–5 October — we'll report on the many interesting records from that event in the next issue.

If all goes well, volume 7(1) will follow now in short order. We will circulate subscription forms for vol. 7 when that issue appears (though if you'd like to pay your subscription now, please feel free to do so!).

While still on the mechanics of *Kenya Birds*, a large 'thank you' is due to John Fanshawe, who has retired from the editorial team. John has been closely involved with producing the magazine from the very start, back in 1992, and we hope he may still occasionally put his shoulder to the wheel where necessary. We will not be an editor short for long, as Joseph Oyugi is re-joining us in time for the next issue. In the meantime, please keep those records and articles pouring in!

Good birding! — *The Editors*

Subscription rates for Volume 7

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Please address all correspondence to: The Editors, **Kenya Birds**, Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658 Nairobi, Kenya.

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News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

Training for bird guides and gamebird scouts

'Fundamentals of Ornithology', the field course for professional bird guides, ran for the third time from 20-25 April 1997, this time at Delamere's Camp, Elmenteita. The twenty participants came from a range of tour companies and hotels. Elmenteita was a lovely setting, good for both waterbirds and landbirds, and of course both food and accommodation were top-notch. The only dampener was the extremely wet weather — those not used to highland forest fieldwork found the dawn excursion to Kieni, in torrential rain, something of a strain (though we did manage to hear and see some interesting birds during breaks in the downpour). The raptor-watching session nearly proved a washout too, but fortunately sunlight broke briefly through the menacing clouds and a surprising number of birds of prey came floating past. Altogether a very enjoyable week for both trainees and trainers.

There was rather a different setting for our next field course, 'An introduction to gamebird biology', which was held at Enkijabe Primary School, Imbirikani Group Ranch, from 25 May to 1 June 1997, with support from the COBRA project of Kenya Wildlife Service. The participants were 12 present or potential gamebird scouts from five group ranches in the Amboseli area. The course aims were to teach appropriate skills for gamebird monitoring and management, and also to demonstrate the potential of bird shooting for revenue generation. As well as a teaching team from the Department, visiting lecturers came from Kenya Wildlife Service, African Wildlife Foundation and the professional hunting fraternity.

Imbirikani town itself, the headquarters of the gamebird project, is a small, bare, dusty settlement that at first glance looks an unpromising site for a training course. However, it is easily accessible from Nairobi and the other group ranches in the area, and surrounded by interesting habitat containing a variety gamebird species. The Enkijabe Teacher's Advisory Centre proved an excellent lecture room, once we had bought some *shukas* for curtains and set up a portable generator (courtesy of Ker and Downey) to run the audio-visual equipment. Magnificent views of Kilimanjaro, looking close enough to touch, were a bonus during tea-breaks. Tents loaned by Bonham Safaris and beds from the school took care of accommodation for everyone, and one of the small 'hotels' in town catered for food (highly rated, despite — or because of? — a very heavy accent on goat stew).

After six days of lectures, field exercises and practicals in different habitats, participants returned to their group ranches fired up to initiate gamebird management programmes like the one already in place on Mbirikani. Another course, this time based at Mpala Ranch in Laikipia District, is planned for April 1998.

Gamebird surveys show spurfowl are under-shot

Imbirikani Group Ranch in Kajiado District is the focus of the Department's gamebird project (see previous *Kenya Birds*). The project is working to set up community systems for managing sport-hunting of gamebirds, and monitoring their populations. In April 1997 a wet-season survey was carried out to assess the numbers of three important gamebird species on the ranch and their habitat requirements. The results show that the highest gamebird numbers were in bushland, which held densities twice as high as wooded grassland or open grassland. Yellow-necked Spurfowl was the commonest of the three species, with around 90 birds per km^2 on average. Spurfowl densities were roughly similar in all habitats, but group sizes were much bigger in the open grassland — perhaps because the lack of cover makes the birds more vulnerable to predation. Helmeted Guineafowl and Crested Francolin did not venture into the open grassland at all, but while the guineafowl were present at low numbers (about 14 birds per km^2) in both woodland and bushland, the francolins much preferred the bushland (50 birds per km^2) and were rare in the woodland (just seven birds per km^2).

Overall, spurfowl preferred areas with good ground and tree cover, suggesting that they are choosing the least-degraded areas of the ranch. It is estimated that between 67,000 and 154,000 spurfowl occur on Imbirikani, with plenty of potential for increasing the numbers that are shot. The populations of francolins and guineafowl are much smaller, and offtake levels probably can rise only slightly.

Based on the survey results, long-term monitoring transects were set up and monthly data are being collected. In the dry season, spurfowl densities on the transects dropped substantially — it turned out that the birds were concentrating in enclosures that had been fenced off near *bomas* for use by calves in the dry season. These enclosures have substantial food and cover and appeared to be dry season 'refuges' for the birds. Local densities here reached the equivalent of an amazing 3,800 birds per km^2 — more than 40 times the average density on the wet-season transects!

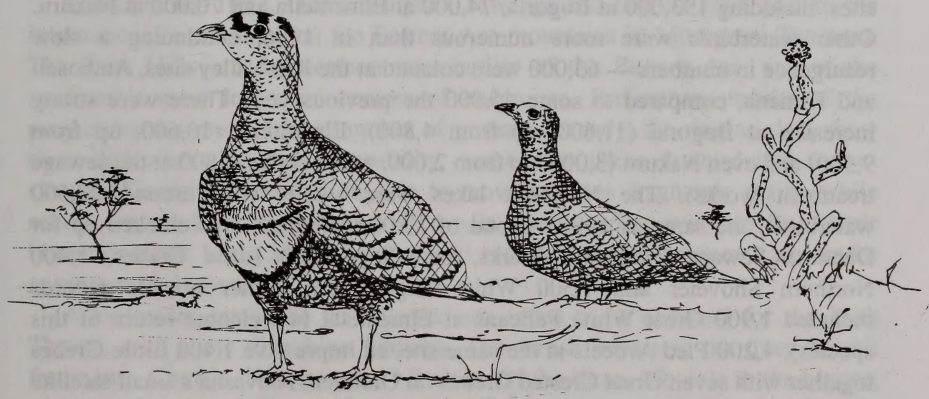
The heavy *el niño* rains that started in November 1997 have put a temporary stop to the monitoring, but (weather permitting) the intention is to collect a full year's data in order to assess seasonal changes in the location and abundance of these gamebird species.

How long will it take for us to lose biodiversity? — on Mt Kenya

After working in Kakamega with Joseph Oyugi (Ornithology Department) through September 1996 (see *Kenya Birds* 5(2): 51), we carried out the last fieldwork component of the collaborative Ornithology Department/University of Tennessee biodiversity project on Mt Kenya in October-November 1996. The field team comprised Thomas Brooks and Christine Wilder (University of Tennessee), John Kageche (Ornithology Department) and Joe Tobias (University of Cambridge), with additional help from Titus Imboma (Ornithology Department), David Gitau and Silvester Karimi (Nairobi Ringing Group) and Jim Barnes (University of East Anglia).

We surveyed seven patches of indigenous montane forest (ranging in size from 1-100 ha) at the lowest extent (2,000 m) of the south-western flank of Mt Kenya, near to the Forest Department stations at Chehe and Ragati. Our sincere gratitude goes to the staff of these stations for all of their help. In each forest fragment we carried out our standard procedure of extensive bird surveys, mist-netting and vegetation surveys. We also briefly surveyed plantations of *Cupressus lusitanica* and *Vitex keniensis*, which held very large numbers of migrant birds — a finding also reported in 1986 by Allan Carlson for plantations north of Kijabe (*Biological Conservation* 35: 195-204). Another interesting element of fieldwork was the abundance of elephants in our study sites, which made fieldwork difficult at times!

Much to our surprise, these tiny forests still held most of the forest bird species found across Mt Kenya as a whole, including rarities like African Green Ibis, African Crowned Eagle and Orange Ground Thrush. This is probably a result of the fact that although cultivation is eating away at the margin of the Mt



Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse — *Edwin Selempo*

Kenya forest, corridors of scrub persist along streams and connect the patches, 'rescuing' otherwise isolated bird populations.

The few Mt Kenya species that we did not find fall into three categories: those restricted to higher altitudes (e.g., Abyssinian Ground Thrush), those that undertake seasonal altitudinal movements (e.g., most of the montane starlings) and those reaching the extreme limits of their ranges on Mt Kenya. It is this latter group that is of cause for concern, and we suspect that a several species, including African Broadbill and Black-headed Apalis may now be close to extinction in the region.

In spite of this, the conservation status of birds on Mt Kenya is relatively encouraging, thanks to the joint activities of the Forest Department and the Kenya Wildlife Service. Although faced with a serious problem in the form of well-armed poachers of the forest's valuable camphor trees, these institutions are, thankfully, doing a very good job of protecting Mt Kenya's montane forests, at least in this part of the mountain.

We closed the field component of our project in December 1996 with visits to Kenya from the USA of two of the projects collaborators, Stuart Pimm (University of Tennessee) and Bob Honea (Oak Ridge National Laboratory). This led into the final part of the project, which took place in Tennessee in 1997 (see below). — *Thomas Brooks, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Waterbird counts 1997

The usual wetlands in the Rift Valley were counted in January 1997, along with Kimana Swamp and the Amboseli wetlands, and a collection of smaller sites around Nairobi. The results were generally similar to 1996. Flamingos were again in relatively low numbers, with only around 365,000 in total on the 'big' sites, including 193,000 at Bogoria, 74,000 at Elmenteita and 70,000 at Nakuru. Other waterbirds were more numerous than in 1996, continuing a slow resurgence in numbers — 63,000 were counted at the Rift Valley sites, Amboseli and Kimana, compared to some 45,000 the previous year. There were strong increases at Bogoria (11,600, up from 4,800), Elmenteita (16,600, up from 9,500) and even Nakuru (3,000, up from 2,000, with another 2,800 at the sewage treatment works). The Naivasha lakes were stable, with around 20,500 waterbirds, the same as 1996. A total of 8,800 waterbirds was clocked up for Dandora Sewage Treatment Works, including 1,000 Little Grebes, 1,400 Northern Shoveler and 1,500 White-winged Tern. Other notable records included 1,900 Great White Pelicans at Elmenteita (a welcome return of this species), 4,200 Pied Avocets at the same site, an impressive 1,400 Little Grebes together with seven Great Crested Grebes on Oloidien, Naivasha's small satellite

lake and 370 African Jacanas in Amboseli. Only four Maccoa Duck were recorded this year, on Naivasha, and no Darters.

The July 1997 count at Lake Nakuru recorded similarly low numbers of flamingos — 87,000, a slight increase on January. Over five thousand of these were young birds. Numbers of other waterbirds were also nearly constant on the lake, at 2,800, despite the absence of Palaearctic migrants at this time of the year. Only 870 birds were counted at the two sewage works.

The July 1997 count had an unhappy ending. Three volunteer counters (Peter Le Pelley, Jennifer Oduori and Justus Kyalo) were seriously injured when their vehicle was involved in an accident near Nakuru, as they travelled back to Nairobi. Fortunately, all have now made a good recovery.

The 1997 waterbird counts were supported financially by the Ramsar Bureau and Kenya Wildlife Service.

Bird crew heads to the hills

Ornithological work on the Taita Hills project has been in full swing since February 1997. David Gitau has been ringing, measuring and colour-banding birds, and taking blood samples, in the different fragments in turn. Edward Waiyaki, assisted by Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, has been trapping, radio-tagging and following Taita Thrushes in Chawia and Ngangao, using a special radio-transmitter design developed for Blackbirds *Turdus merula* (and extensively tested for safety) in the UK. Mwangi Githiru has been counting and watching frugivores and censusing fruiting trees as part of his study of the potential effects of fragmentation on seed dispersal. Luc Lens from the University of Antwerp made several visits to the hills to collect additional data and to supervise the work.

In December 1997, Gitau, Waiyaki, Mwangi and Luc all took part in the international conference on the Eastern Arc mountains in Morogoro, Tanzania. The Taita Hills are the northernmost outlier of the Eastern Arc, one of the continent's most important centres of endemism. Preliminary results of the project were presented in a number of posters. Already, the ringing data show clear differences in species' mobility: some, like Olive Sunbird and Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, seem to be able to move between fragments easily, while others are much more sedentary. There is also growing evidence from their biometrics that birds in the smaller and more disturbed fragments are under environmental stress.

A molecular sex-probe has allowed sex-ratios to be assessed for the Taita Thrush, with some disturbing findings. The thrush occurs in the three largest fragments, Chawia, Ngangao and Mbololo. Of the three, Mbololo is the biggest and most intact and Chawia the smallest and most disturbed. Only in Mbololo

are the numbers of male and female thrushes equal; in Chawia, just one out of ten birds (10%) turned out to be female, and at Ngangao only nine out of 23 (39%). The reason why females are less common in small fragments is not yet known, but the finding has worrying implications for the species' survival. On the other hand, Taita Thrushes have now been captured, to everyone's surprise, in the tiny fragment of Yale, showing that under some circumstances they may be able to persist in small fragments after all.

Bird research in the Taita Hills — a view from the ground

Our work started on 9 February 1997 with an aim of studying the effects of forest fragmentation on the biodiversity of Taita Hills forests. The work centres on the study of birds, insects and mammals.

To start the project, we sampled the three biggest forest fragments — Chawia, Ngangao and Mbololo — over the course of around ten weeks. Our first study site was Chawia where we spent a week. On the evening of 10 February mist-nets were set in two sites in Chawia and controlled the following day, then shifted daily to other sites in the forest. Chawia had rather few birds, especially the endemics. A few Taita White-eyes were ringed and larger numbers seen. Just two Taita thrushes were seen and none ringed, and there was no sign of the Taita Apalis. We ringed 69 birds in total, a mixture of new birds and retraps of birds caught by Tom Brooks' team the previous year (see *Kenya Birds* 5(2)).

On the morning of 16 February we closed and took down the nets at 10:00, broke camp and shifted to Ngangao. On the same day in the afternoon nets were pitched in our new study area, and controlled the following day. Ngangao was really a forest for birding. We spent a whole month here with intensive mist netting and other general surveying. The forest always had something interesting to offer, including all three endemic Taita hills birds. Despite the dry weather, these were breeding. We found a pair of Taita Apalis with young in the nest, and a juvenile Taita Thrush was caught at our last site. We ringed a total of 18 bird species including 300 individuals birds among which were 21 Taita Thrushes.

Nets were closed and brought down on 15 March in readiness to take off to the next fragment — Mbololo. Edward Waiyaki arrived the same day with transport. By this time, rain was threatening, which gave us cause for some concern. On 18 March we made a general survey of the forest and pitched nets in the evening. Nets were opened the following morning and controlled the whole day — a successful session with about four Taita Thrushes. The rain poured steadily the following afternoon but after a fine morning of ringing. Thereafter the rains were quite unpredictable — it was impossible to tell whether the day would be fine or rained off completely, and there was often thick mist as well. To be on the safe side, David Gitau and I stayed behind as

Waiyaki returned for Nairobi. The weather was against us, though, and the mist and rain greatly reduced our daily catch. We spent a total of four weeks in Mbololo and managed to catch about 165 new birds and 13 that were ringed last year.

Mobile Olive Sunbirds and hornbills

All the three fragments had quite a number of Olive Sunbirds, which were commonly seen and trapped. Other common sunbirds were the Eastern Double-collared Sunbird, Collared Sunbird and the Variable Sunbird, which was always seen at the forest edge. I was always surprised by how many Olive Sunbirds we would catch without obtaining a single retrap. On 6 March 1997 at 08:30 h we caught an Olive Sunbird in Ngangao that had been ringed by us on 12 February in Chawia, about 18 km away. Evidently this species is moving both within and between fragments, presumably in response to local food supply or other conditions.

Other local migration was seen in Silvery-cheeked Hornbills. The hornbills were all over Chawia for the whole time we were there, but we only saw them once in Ngangao, on 11 March. In Mbololo, we arrived on 18 March and saw hornbills for the first time on 29 March. A good number of birds arrived and stayed for about a week before disappearing. Hornbills are known to move a good deal in response to local concentrations of fruiting trees.

Barbets chase off brood parasites

Brood parasites do not always have things their own way. On 21 February I watched a family of four Spot-flanked Barbet (two adults and two immature birds) making a great deal of noise around their nest hole, in a branch in an *Albizia* tree. At noon that day, out of nowhere, a Lesser Honeyguide arrived .With full confidence, it made an attempt to enter the nest in presence of the barbets. Two barbets physically fought the honeyguide outside the nest while the rest stayed inside the nest making a tremendous noise. The honeyguide eventually gave up the fight and flew away. Immediately after it had left, an egg was removed from the nest by the barbets inside and passed over to the barbets outside, who in turn broke it and threw it away. Afterwards, there was no more noise from the barbets.

General status of the fragments

Chawia forest was highly degraded. There was a way through the forest which enable the local people enter the forest whenever they wished for various purposes, including firewood collection. The cypress and *Eucalyptus* plantations surrounding the natural forest are spreading into it and degrading the forest

more. Even though not many old pit-saw sites are seen, the forest still seems to be under human pressure. The forest is dominated by two main indigenous trees, *Tabernaemontana* and *Albizia.* These two form the top canopy. A lot of wild coffee forms most of the lower and mid canopy.

Ngangao on the other hand is among the best forests in Taita hills despite of its many old pit-saw sites. It has a range of trees from pioneer species to real forest interior ones. Common pioneer species include *Phoenix* palms, *Bridelia micrantha* and *Maesa lanceolata. Celtis* and *Ficus* species are also common. The forest lacks the bigger trees (removed by logging in the late 1960s and early 1970s) but Meru Oak *Vitex keniensis* shows good regeneration. The tree seems to be growing evenly in Ngangao, and is an important one for birds. If the forest department could consider this tree in its annual plantation programme, it could greatly help to enrich biodiversity.

Mbololo is yet another good forest, with large old trees. Not much logging seems to have been done even though old pit-saw sites were found. The forest is much more remote and inaccessible than Ngangao, and large logging vehicles probably could not easily manage the steep, winding road up from Voi. — *Titus Imboma, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

How long will it take for us to lose biodiversity? — in Tennessee!

The final part of the collaborative Ornithology Department/University of Tennessee project to assess the length of the time lag between deforestation and bird extinction (see *Kenya Birds* 5(1):1) was carried out over the spring of 1997. The location of the work was now Knoxville, Tennessee, USA, where Thomas Brooks is writing up the results of the project for his PhD, under the supervision of Stuart Pimm. Pimm generously hosted Kenyan ornithologists Joseph Oyugi and John Kageche (Ornithology Department/Moi University) in Knoxville, with funding from the National Geographic Society (Research Award #5542-95) and his Pew Fellowship in conservation.

Oyugi's work in Tennessee focused on analyzing his data collected in Kakamega in August-December 1996 (see Kenya Birds 5(2): 51) for his MSc thesis for the Department of Wildlife Management, Moi University. Oyugi used the many measurements that he took of vegetation in the main Kakamega forest to predict bird populations in the surrounding fragments. He then compared this with the results of his bird surveys in these fragments, to assess which species are affected by forest fragmentation over and above the changes suffered by the vegetation. His results indicate that understorey insectivores (like Brown-chested Alethe) and canopy foliage-gleaners (like Uganda Woodland Warbler and Green Hylia) have been particularly seriously impacted by the fragmentation of the Kakamega forests.

Meanwhile, Kageche was writing his proposal for his MSc with the Department of Environmental Studies, Moi University. While in Tennessee, Kageche also analyzed the ringing data of the biodiversity project, and collected data on the human population and rate of deforestation in the Taita Hills, for a study with Bob Honea (Oak Ridge National Laboratory, USA).

To supplement these specific projects, Oyugi, Kageche and Brooks made a trip to the northern USA in mid-June, to some of the world's largest museums. Funded by a grant from the American Museum of Natural History (New York), we also visited the Field Museum (Chicago), the Museum of Comparative Zoology (Boston) and the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.) — many thanks to the generosity of the curators of those museums. We examined over 4,500 bird specimens from Kakamega, Mt Kenya and the Taita Hills, including rarities such as the only Kenyan record of Sooty Boubou *Laniarius leucorhynchus* and Splendid Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis splendidus*, which is now probably extinct in Kakamega, and we are preparing a series of papers based on these data. We also drove over 3,000 miles, and even managed to fit in a trip to Niagara Falls!

We also managed to find a few other diversions to our academic efforts. Through April-May, Oyugi and Kageche worked in the Everglades National Park, Florida, with a project (directed by Pimm) on the endangered Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow *Ammodramus maritimus mirabilis*, which was educational, if excessively mosquito-ridden! Brooks, along with two other members of the biodiversity project, Christine Wilder from Tennessee, USA and Jim Barnes from Leeds, UK, visited in May, and we all had a chance to see interesting birds like American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* and the rare Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis*, and visit interesting places like the Big Cypress National Preserve — to say nothing of Key West! Back in Tennessee, we visited the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Chattanooga Aquarium (the world's biggest freshwater aquarium), and the Eastern State Wildlife Management Area in Knoxville (to see the amazing display of the American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*).

Altogether, the trip was both productive and entertaining, and provided a fitting end to the biodiversity project. In conclusion, we would like to thank our sponsors, and everyone in the Ornithology Department (National Museums of Kenya), Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (University of Tennessee), and the many people who helped us in Kakamega, the Taita Hills and Mt Kenya for doing so much to make the project a success.— *Joseph Oyugi, John Kageche & Thomas Brooks, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Ornithologists snare scholarships

It has been a promising period for post-graduate scholarships, with several Department staff and associates securing support for further training. Oliver Nasirwa and Wenceslas Gatarabirwa have both been awarded a prestigious Wellcome Trust Fellowship in Biodiversity Conservation. The Fellowships will support their MSc course in Applied Ecology at the University of East Anglia, which started in September 1997. This will be followed by a year's research work in Kenya, supervised by the Department and by Bill Sutherland from UEA. Oliver plans to work on papyrus birds in Lake Victoria and Wenceslas on the Aberdare Cisticola. This is the first time these Fellowships have been offered and in world-wide competition only five were awarded — so we are very happy to have snagged two of them!

Meanwhile, Edward Waiyaki has been awarded a scholarship for his PhD at the University of Antwerp by the Algemeen Bestuur Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (i.e., the Development Section) of the Belgian Government. This is a so-called 'sandwich' grant that will allow him to carry out fieldwork in Kenya on the Taita Thrush and write up his results in Antwerp, as well as making several shorter study visits to Belgium. Waiyaki will be supervised by Erik Matthysen and Luc Lens of the University of Antwerp and André Dhondt of Cornell University. Muchane Muchai, who recently completed his MPhil dissertation on Sharpe's Longclaw, secured a Claude Harris Leon Doctoral Fellowship that will provide support for his PhD at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology in Cape Town. Muchai will be working on the Yellowbreasted Pipit *Hemimacronyx chloris*, a South African grassland endemic that faces some similar conservation problems to Sharpe's Longclaw. He will be supervised by the Fitzstitute's Director, Morné du Plessis, and by David Allan of the Durban Museum. This is the inaugural year for both of these scholarship schemes, too.

Last but not least, Peter Njoroge, who has worked on Hinde's Babbler and more recently on the Important Bird Areas project, has been awarded an RSPB scholarship for a PhD at Reading University. Starting in October 1998, he will be working on the Seychelles Magpie Robin, one of the world's most endangered birds, supervised by Ken Norris of Reading and Debbie Pain of the RSPB.

Students find the going rough

1997 seems to have been a difficult year for Departmental Research Associates, who have variously faced problems caused by the unseasonal rains, uncooperative study animals and misbehaving machinery.

Carter Ong continued her challenging work on the home range and behaviour of the Martial Eagle. These huge eagles hunt from an unusually high altitude and can move over enormous distances, so tracking a radio-tagged bird is unusually difficult — even if you can capture the eagle and tag it in the first place! Fortunately, several pairs of eagles nest within a few kilometres of Carter's base at Athi River, and despite problems with the trapping and with transmitters malfunctioning much new information is being obtained.

It has not all been smooth sailing for Mburu Chege's Egyptian Vulture project either — this year none of the Hell's Gate birds has succumbed to poisoning, but they haven't succumbed to Mburu's attempts to capture them either. A battery of crafty methods has been tried (some of them sounding distinctly unpleasant for the researcher!), but the birds remain entirely unimpressed and, unfortunately, untagged. This has not stopped Mburu collecting data on behaviour and breeding biology — but it has been impossible to carry out the home-range work originally planned.

Neither did Fabian Musila have much luck with his Sokoke Pipit studies. Fieldwork would have started in November 1997 — had not the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest been (literally) underwater thanks to the amazing *el niño* rains. It would have been interesting to find out if Sokoke Pipits could turn aquatic, but data collection has been postponed until the study sites are a little more accessible.

Luca Borghesio of the University of Milan had an unfortunate start to his study of nothern Kenya forests when an accident forced him to abandon his planned fieldwork in Marsabit in April 1997. He returned in November for a trip to Mt Kulal, accompanied by Kariuki Ndang'ang'a (taking time off from the Taita Hills). This went more smoothly, despite the wet weather and general insecurity in the area, and the results are being written up. Luca will be back in April 1998 for a survey of the Leroghi Forest near Maralal.

Request for information: Common Kestrels

I am trying to locate nest sites of Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in Kenya for a study of their nesting and foraging habits. If you have recently seen these falcons nesting or showing other signs of breeding, such as mating or feeding the young, please inform me at the address below. I am particularly looking for an area with a good number of nesting pairs (five or more). I am interested only in our resident kestrels, not the migrants which may occur between October and March and which of course do not breed here. — *George Amutete, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

East Africa Natural History Society

OS-c and BirdLife Kenya merge

Tuesday 5 August 1997 saw the inaugural meeting of the East Africa Natural History Society's new Bird Committee. This has been formed by the amalgamation of the two previous committees that dealt with birds: the Ornithological Sub-committee and BirdLife Kenya. The new committee will handle all the work that the previous committees were involved in, including bird records, the publication of *Scopus* and *Kenya Birds*, raising funds and awareness for conservation, and generally keeping an eye on bird conservation issues. The streamlined structure should allow members to communicate more easily and to work more effectively together — and the new name should be a good deal less confusing and easier to say!

BirdLife African Partnership Meeting

The East Africa Natural History Society, the BirdLife International Partner in Kenya, hosted the Third Meeting of the African Partnership of BirdLife International at Elsamere, Lake Naivasha, from 18-22 November 1997. Delegates attended from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, together with the BirdLife Secretariat and the UK Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The programme was very packed, including not just a good deal of formal Partnership business but a planning workshop for the GEF-funded project, 'African NGO-Government Partnerships for Sustainable Biodiversity Action'. This project will support the next phase of the Important Bird Areas programme in ten African countries, including Kenya (more on this in the next *Kenya Birds*).

Some important decisions taken were to form a Council of the African Partnership (CAP) that will meet annually, to appoint a Technical Advisory Committee (taking over from the old IBA Steering Committee) and to admit Naturama (Burkina Faso), the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe (OAZ) as BirdLife Partners Designate.

The *el niño* rains had set in firmly, and the weather was wet, but this did not stop a good deal of birding going on in between sessions. Eleonora's Falcons put in several guest appearances overhead during the tea-breaks and delegates enjoyed short excursions onto the lake, to Hell's Gate (where the Nyanza Swifts put on an excellent display but Wailing Cisticolas proved elusive) and the Kinangop Plateau. The next meeting of CAP will be in Zimbabwe in June 1998.

International

Climate change and wildlife

Climate change is having a major impact on the world's birds and other wildlife, warns 'Climate Change and Wildlife', a new report from BirdLife International and the World Wide Fund for Nature. In the UK, almost a third of 65 breeding bird species have shifted their laying dates forward by a statistically significant amount (an average of nine days) over the last 25 years. Ninety percent of the 5 million Sooty Shearwaters that used to spend the non-breeding season off the west coast of the USA vanished between 1987 and 1994, due to changes in ocean surface temperature and ocean currents (reduced upwelling) associated with climate change. In the cloud forests of Costa Rica, many birds, including the Keel-billed Toucan and Blue-crowned Motmot, have extended their ranges up the mountain slopes. There are many other examples from other groups of animals and plants. The report warns that many organisms will be unable to shift their ranges quickly enough to cope with climate change, especially where (as in many parts of the world) natural habitats are scattered and fragmented. The impact of small recent changes in climate on wildlife is already very visible — what will be the effects of the large climate changes forecast for the next century? The disruptive effects of climate change on the ecosystems that support human existence, warns the report, are likely to be a serious threat to our own welfare.

(For more information, see the *EANHS Bulletin* vol. 27(2/3) or the report 'Climate Change and Wildlife' in the EANHS office and library.)

Exciting new site for Orange-necked Partridge

Endemic to the Southern Vietnamese lowlands Endemic Bird Area, Orange-necked Partridge *Arborophila davidi* is the least known member of its genus — indeed, it is known only from a single specimen collected in 1927. Despite brief sightings by a BirdLife team in Cat Tien National Park in 1991, the species has remained an enigma until now and is listed as one of the most critically threatened birds in Asia.

The BirdLife Vietnam Programme has long suspected that this species occurs in the Cat Loc Nature Reserve, adjacent to Cat Tien. This has recently been confirmed by a team from the BirdLife International Vietnam Programme, Amsterdam University and the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, the Netherlands.

During a week-long visit to Cat Loc Nature Reserve in April 1997, Orange-necked Partridge was found to be common in a variety of habitats including scrub, bamboo and secondary evergreen forest. Its vocalizations and preference

for hillslopes confirm that it is closely related to Bar-backed Partridge *Arborophila brunneopectus*.

The team made over 25 sightings during the week. The species' tolerance of a range of disturbed habitats and the extent of suitable habitat outside the nature reserve all suggest that its current category of threat should be revised. However, since BirdLife's last visit to the site three years ago, much primary forest has been cleared inside the nature reserve to make way for commercial cashew-nut cultivation.

Despite the fame of this site in supporting Vietnam's only known population of the Javan Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, the reserve remains unprotected and forest destruction is proceeding unchecked and at an alarming rate.

BirdLife's work in Vietnam is funded by the European Union.

Green-backed Heron — *Edwin Selempo*

World Birdwatch '97
A special report

With the theme '1,111 threatened bird species need your help!', World Birdwatch 1997 in Kenya was officially launched on 2 October at the Boulevard Hotel, Nairobi. More than 100 people attended the evening reception, where the British High Commissioner, Jeffrey James, was Guest of Honour and spoke entertainingly about his own birding experiences.

Were it not for previous diplomatic commitments, the High Commissioner would certainly have joined the us on the Birdwatch weekend. He would have been in good company, as 300 people in more than 70 teams spent 4-5 October scouring nearly every corner of the country for birds. The response from birdwatchers all over Kenya was tremendous; more birders than ever, in more places than ever, took part, and most seem thoroughly to have enjoyed themselves.

This year the event was focused on Kenya's threatened birds. Fourteen globally-threatened species were recorded, including Lesser Kestrel, Sokoke Scops Owl, Sokoke Pipit, Sharpe's Longclaw, Taita Thrush, East Coast Akalat, Hinde's Babbler, Papyrus Yellow Warbler, Turner's Eremomela, Aberdare Cisticola, Grey-crested Helmet-shrike, Abbott's Starling, Amani Sunbird and Clarke's Weaver. Another ten species on the list are globally near-threatened, including Madagascar Squacco Heron, Lesser Flamingo, Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Fischer's Turaco, Malindi Pipit, Papyrus Gonolek, Red-throated Tit, Plain-backed Sunbird and Jackson's Widowbird.

Once all the checklists had finally come in (some took a month or more to arrive) and had been vetted (also a time-consuming business!) the final tally stood at an impressive 777 species. BirdLife International has confirmed that this was the highest total for the weekend of any country in the world, so Kenya's birders have every reason to be proud of themselves. We would have notched up another four species (African Barred Owlet, Mombasa Woodpecker and Green-headed Oriole) had a checklist from Shimba not gone astray, despite frantic efforts to communicate at both ends. Somehow, Narina Trogon also got lost in the wash when the final list was being computerised, so the 'real' total should be 781! Computerising the National Birdmap forms that each team returned is going to take some time still, but later on we hope to give additional statistics on the results — which birds were most commonly seen, which were seen only by a particular team, and so on. The most interesting records will also be published in the next *Kenya Birds*. Out of many notable sightings, perhaps the most remarkable was Black-and-white Flycatcher by Maia Hemphill's team

at Shimoni — this bird has not been recorded in coastal Kenya for more than half a century!

Around the world, over 200,000 people in 91 countries took part in WBW '97. Over the course of October 5,935 bird species were seen in the 3rd 'NTT World Bird Count', a parallel event to World Birdwatch to which our list of birds also contributes. NTT Corporation donates 1,000 Yen for each species recorded, so the event worldwide raised the equivalent of around KSh 2.7 million for bird conservation.

Our excellent weekend total is still not quite as high as in 1993, probably for several reasons. An earlier date meant fewer Palaearctic migrants, and in fact the season was extremely poor for migrants generally. Many areas up-country were dry and birds were keeping a low profile, while by contrast torrential rain at the coast washed out one day completely. Also, we didn't receive nearly the same support from the tourist industry this year to help send people out and about to key places. The timing was unfortunate: most hotels and tour companies were still reeling from the violent events of August at the coast, which led to mass cancellations by overseas visitors.

There was an array of (more or less) glittering prizes for the event on offer, from Swarowski Optik and others. Two buyers of raffle-tickets at the launch correctly guessed the official species total — Neil Davidson won a Swarowski wrist-watch and Kimbo Beakbane a framed photograph of a Lilac-breasted Roller by Gabriel Ramson. The award for the most bird species seen was shared between the teams of Colin Jackson, Peter Njoroge and Ogeto Mwebi, who spent a manic weekend in and around Busia and Trans-Nzoia (see below) and Bill Harvey's team, who were birding in the Ngong Rift and near Thika. Both teams saw over 200 species and were rewarded with Swarowski t-shirts and caps. The 'best school' prize (binoculars and books donated by the RSPB, and a Zimmerman *et al.* field guide from East African Ornithological Safaris) was awarded collectively to the team from Sokoke, Gede and Kakuyuni Secondary Schools (see below). The 'most adventurous team' prize (binoculars from Bushnell — the event sponsors — and the RSPB) was won hands-down by Titus Imboma and Bernard Amakobe, who travelled to Lokichoggio by public transport to clean up on the far north-western specials. We had also hoped to give a prize for the team raising the most sponsorship, but in the end this proved impossible to assess — the system of numbering sponsor forms didn't work too well.

Despite the difficult timing, the event received financial or logistical support from quite a number of companies, and individual sponsors responded very generously. When all contributions are in, around 300,000/= KSh will have been

raised for the special project of publishing an introductory bird guide for school environmental clubs.

WBW '97 was overall a great success, thanks to the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants and the generosity of the sponsors. Not everything went smoothly, though. Organising an event like this is a major task involving lots of people, and there were undoubtedly some lapses in the co-ordination. Some participants received information late or failed to receive material they had asked for. Every time World Birdwatch takes place, the event is slightly different, and there seem to be new lessons to be learned. If you have suggestions for improvements, why not help to make the event even better next time and let the organisers know via the East Africa Natural History Society (P O Box 44486, Nairobi).

We received rather few detailed reports on the event, but below are some highlights from what participants wrote when they submitted their checklists — plus a few longer write-ups. We hope they capture some of the flavour of the weekend across the country.

WBW '97: some highlights from your letters

Lake Naivasha: "It was very sucessful and a great weekend, despite some difficulties, including lack of co-operation from some of the farm owners around that limited our coverage to a small area. Breeding was observed for weavers, sparrows, Superb Starling, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Augur Buzzard." — *North Lake Bird Trackers (Peter Ruoro, Zachary Methu, Hellen Wanjiku, Priscilla Wandia), P O Box 260, Naivasha.*

Mweiga: "I watched birds in my home area, Mweiga, and identified 71 species. There were many other birds that we were not able to identify especially larks, cisticolas and other warblers. We used public transport and hiked for long hours." — *Patrick Karimi, P O Box 73, Mweiga*

Nyeri: "I have really enjoyed this year's birding. With most people unaware of the exercise, it was difficult to win their hearts to join me and so I did it all alone. I felt that maybe I recorded a low number... the area is rich with birds but I am still taking time to learn them." — *Stephen Wamiti, P O Box 75, Nyahururu*

Laikipia: "My group consisted of four... we were all amateurs so to speak but with interest in birding. Needless to state, we couldn't identify numerous small species especially the weavers and cisticolas as most were similar. The nightjars

all seemed alike to us! We spotted and positively identified 104 birds and spent about 13 hrs in total. We covered at least 120 km and thoroughly enjoyed the birding." — *Bell Okello, P O Box 555, Nanyuki*

Kericho: "It's my hope that most of the teams had a good time — it was the same with us. We encountered some problems with transport and optics. The hill known as Kimugu Forest was among the most interesting sites in Kericho with unusual species, including flycatchers, shrikes, wattle-eyes and greenbuls. We saw nests of African Blue Flycatcher and Hamerkop." — *Peter Chirchir, P O Box 72, Naivasha*

Kinangop: "Birdwatch '97 was very interesting. However, some school clubs very new to this field found it less enjoyable as their patrons were caught by the teachers' national strike. I met with several student groups who trekked quite long distances all day without food or drink and thus were quite exhausted at the end of the event. Our own team though found the event excellent." — *Francis Njuguna, P O Box 1346, Naivasha*

Nyahururu: "We had challenging but enjoyable birding. We stuck bird posters on our vehicle, gave sponsorship forms and talked to local people about the value of birds and the significance of the birdwatch event." — *Cecilia Gichuki, Nathan Gichuki, Lucy Gakuo & Charles Waihenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Thika and Mwea: "Our list adds up to 130 species. Unfortunately we didn't see Hinde's Babbler, Purple-crested Turaco, Trumpeter Hornbill or Grey-olive Greenbul, so we hope some of the other teams were more lucky. It was great fun anyway!" — *Gunhild Frandsen, c/o T. Lehmberg, P O Box 30592, Nairobi.*

Nanyuki: "The most interesting species in these lists is a small flock of Ethiopian Swallows (adults with immatures) seen at Nanyuki Sewage Ponds. The 30 acre main counting area which was also covered in 1993 showed very few species on account of the very dry period before the count and rain and overcast the second day." — *Tim &Lise Campbell, P O Box 14469, Nairobi.*

WCK Schools Team, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

On 4 October, three secondary schools from around Arabuko-Sokoke Forest joined forces and met with five members of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides team to bird watch for the first time in the scrubland around Sokoke Secondary School. There were four Wildlife Club patrons and 15 students, coming from

Gede, Sokoke and Kakuyuni. The patron from Sokoke, a keen birdwatcher, had spent some days previously doing a recce with one of the guides to locate favourabe spots, all within walking distance ofthe school.

After early morning rain at 7:30 am, the students were able to start, having had instruction on how to use the binoculars and books (supplied by the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Education Unit), and the rules of the birdwatch explained. Birds were pointed out by both students and guides and everyone had to see the bird and check it in the books before moving on. Despite this rather slow method, the studnts managed to see 47 species in four hours.

The highlight was a sighting of a Great Sparrowhawk on its nest. The bird remained settled despite our proximity. All the students managed to get really clear sightings of it and the patron and students from Sokoke have agreed to monitor it over the next few months. Other birds that were exciting to see were the Pygmy Kingfisher, White-faced Whistling Duck, Palmnut Vulture, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Violet-backed Starling. — *Tansy Bliss, P O Box 383, Watamu*

World Birdwatch — Mombasa style

We had a really great time although the weather decided to be more like April than October... and then I managed to begin the first day (at 6 am) with a puncture, so started off wet and muddy after grovelling under the car to sort out the jack etc. (I must get some birders who can also change tyres — I am very badly organised in this direction.) Four die-hards turned out at 6 am on the Saturday and we 'did' Nguuni farm, breaking off to eat buns and drink coffee in order to dry out and warm up a bit. It was more like the Arctic than Mombasa. Anyway the birds seemed to enjoy it and we had some real treats. Could hardly believe my eyes when a Goliath Heron took off in front of us (have NEVER seen it on this patch before), we managed to trail him and watch him at leisure. The other three had never actually seen one so very excited. Then lo and behold one of my keen-eyed youngsters saw a brown flap round the edge of some trees which I recognised as an owl and on getting him in the glasses there was a Spotted Eagle Owl, being beaten up by the crows needless to say. Again Paul and Kevin were seeing one for the first time and in daylight to boot. He was very obliging and stayed around for some time for us to get a good look. Immediately afterward Paul spotted a huge Black Mamba in the acacia, so long we thought it was two at first. Such excitement. We already had approximately 58 species. Saturday pm saw the FFJ (Friends of Fort Jesus) birders joining us, and of course the pm didn't match the excitement of the morning but we added a few species. Sunday 6 am was dry but threatening for Kevin, Paul and myself. We

went Husseini side of the same area and added all the waders to our list. The weather held until about nine when I had to dash away. Sunday afternoon was again pouring with rain and only the two old ladies, myself and Mrs Paltridge ventured out. We dragged Mr P. out for security and we all got soaked to the skin but added Wattled Starlings to our list. What a great week-end! — *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

Heat and dust on the Nguruman Escarpment

Our five-strong team (led by Damaris Rotich, with Catherine Ngarachu, Narinder Heyer, Joanne Naitore and myself) left for Nguruman on Friday 3 October, and had an early night at the ICIPE field station in preparation for the following weekend. On Saturday morning, already around the station, Damaris and Catherine saw an interesting thrush-type thing, of which they discussed for most of the day. In the end it was identified as a Spotted Morning Thrush, as much through its early hours and behaviour as by its markings.

We departed soon after ingesting a piece of bread and a mildly warm cup of coffee (the birds were singing in full force by this time!) We went south on a track out of the field station, paralleling the river. In part our route was driven by a need to deposit two young fishermen at a good spot on the river, but it took forever to get there because we saw so many birds along the way. The first to figure out were the multitudinous doves: the African Mourning Dove, which Damaris says sounds like it is on the way to a relative's funeral; the Namaqua Dove, the Laughing Dove, and the beautiful Emerald-spotted Wood Dove.

On the way we saw individual Kori Bustards, a few Secretary Birds, and an incredible concentration of Black-headed Herons, unexpectedly out in the middle of a dry grassland. I think Narinder counted 30 from one vantage point, each stalking out a territory full of something of interest to them (grasshoppers?).

Catherine brought us all to a stop at one point, about to pass by a dry shrub just feet away from the car, with two White-throated Bee-eaters perched on its branches, each intensely surveying the grassland in different directions.

Then, oddly out in the middle of a extremely arid patch of land, Narinder saw some 'white blobs'. We crept up as quietly as one could in a Land Rover, and realized that they were a large flock of Gull-billed Terns. We began to wonder if a lack of breakfast might be causing hallucinations, as after all this is really dry land, but Damaris confirmed that these terns, in any case, can be found in dryland, far away from water.

We also saw a number of raptors, including the Brown Snake Eagle which is

especially abundant in this area. Large flocks of Helmeted Guineafowl and a few Yellow-necked Spurfowl insisted on being counted by slowly crossing our track.

Once we got to the river the White-headed Barbets were chatting with the baboons in the figs (*Ficus sycomorus*). Grey-headed Kingfishers flashed over the water, and the Gull-billed Terns swooped by, showing that they do like water after all. In the *Salvadora* thickets further away from the river we saw the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, a beautiful Little Bee-eater, a White-browed Scrub Robin, some hornbills, Masked Weavers and a Cardinal Woodpecker.

More of our team arrived from Nairobi, and sighted Little Egrets, Yellow-billed Storks, Hadada Ibis, Lesser Flamingos, Great White Pelican, Grey Heron and Blacksmith Plover in Lake Magadi on the way over.

Lunch back at the ICIPE field station proved to be very rich as we sighted a number of birds coming to a leaky hose just outside the canteen. Here we saw more weavers, Red-billed Quelea, Red-billed Firefinch, Crimson-rumped and Common Waxbill, Blue-capped Cordon-blue, a lovely Grey-headed Silverbill and a White-bellied Canary.

After lunch, we again took a track south. We were trying to go directly to the Shompole woodland, but ended up taking a very roundabout route. This probably was to our advantage in the end because we ran into many interesting birds, including a female ostrich incubating 27 eggs! The woodland itself held a variety of raptors including Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Martial Eagle and Rüppell's Griffon Vulture. Harlequin Quail preceded us on our track through tall grass.

The next morning we headed toward the escarpment from the ICIPE field station. On the road up to the water source for the Magadi Soda factory we stopped several times in the woodland sites and saw a good selection of birds, including Rufous-crowned Roller and Red-faced Crombec.

In Nguruman village we walked through a shady mango orchard and saw chickens but not too many other birds — although the Cardinal Woodpecker was here as well. On our way out of the village an African Hoopoe was pecking in the dirt near a house. We arrived at the base of the escarpment in the heat of midday, not a very good time to see birds in this dry country. While some of the team continued up a good way, a few of us sat under a tree and waited for birds to come to us. We were not disappointed when a Common Scimitar-bill flew in to flash his white wing bands at us and then left. A sunbird could be seen in the bushes but was never clear enough to identify — the only sunbird seen all weekend!

Out for a final foray after lunch, we explored intensely in the area around the ICIPE field station, locating a rich number of birds. In a bush on the fence betweeen ICIPE and KETRI, we saw Tawny-flanked Prinia and Rufous

Chatterers. We went past KETRI down to the river where the rock outcropping makes a thin canyon and a small waterfall. This was evidently where the birds that we went to see on the escarpment were hiding, staying cool in the heat of the day. Here we saw again a number of weavers, and the Mountain Wagtail. An African Fish Eagle flew over. Kingfishers were numerous, including Pgymy, Pied and a Woodland.

It was time to hurry back to Nairobi! Despite our rush, Catherine identified a Two-banded Courser crossing the road in front of us. Crossing Lake Magadi, we saw more waterbirds, including Chestnut-banded Plover ("with a red necklace", as Narinder described it), to wind up a very productive weekend's birding. — *Barbara Gemmill, P O Box 30772, Nairobi.*

'Bird-till-you-drop' in western Kenya

So... World BirdWatch '97 — and the choice of almost anywhere in Kenya to aim for in order to get the most species and, in particular, to cover as many species as possible that others won't see so as to bump up the national total (we're competing with those South Americans after all!) A safari in the new Dept. Land Rover and western Kenya looks like the place to go — a LOT of mega birds that no-one else will find as they're restricted to that area only — you KNOW it makes sense!! In fact the safari was pretty totally mega over all... the sites we got to — ones I've only dreamed of visiting! Let me continue with the full account — are you sitting comfortably?!

We set off on Friday am (3 October) about one and half hours late (what's new?!) and with a fully loaded vehicle. Passengers included our team of four (myself, Peter Njoroge ('Mr Important Bird Areas', Kenya), Ogeto Mwebi (osteologist but mega-keen birder really), and a Chinese lady, Xu, a reporter from a Chinese Government newspaper who wanted to cover the event and was very keen to visit the places we were planning to go to — an interesting combination and one that proved to add to the fun of the weekend!) and two other teams who we dropped at various places along the route to the Sio River in Busia, right on the border with Uganda, the site of the Blue Swallow roost and a host of other goodies. We'd been given sketch maps by Don Turner of where to find particular sites that were good for certain species that were difficult/ impossible to find elsewhere in Kenya... and headed straight for them without faffing around at other sites — time being the main limiting factor.

As we pulled out of the Museum and down the hill past the Casino I noticed a raptor in the sky: YES! an Ayres's Hawk Eagle — one of Kenya's rarer eagles and a great start to the safari! We arrived at the Sio River with just 40 mins or so left of daylight to swot up a bit on the calls of some of the birds there — Yellow-

throated Leaflove, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Olive-bellied Sunbird... so that in the morning when the manic birding began we could clock them up faster (and I never thought I go twitching!). We camped that night in the compound of an old Mzee who lived right next to the river near the road and who was very happy to see Njoro again (he'd been here last year on a survey for Blue Swallows). Xu had brought a few tins of Chinese food (interesting...!) to complement the bread and milk we'd bought for supper (and breakfast, and lunch...) and which we ate by the light of two red candles she'd also brought. All very civilised. However, I'm not really sure Xu knew what she was in for — we were doing the trip on a strictly survival basis with no luxuries and full-time birding (naturally)... and she'd never even slept in a tent before (let alone eaten in a kiosk, sampled mandazis, nor even much used a knife and fork, etc.)! Nonetheless she survived fine and lived to tell the tale (literally...) and has actually done some birding of her own since then (how's that for effective propaganda?)

Next morning, up at 5:30 am and listening for owls and nightjars. First bird was a calling Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis nigriscapularis* (a race of Fiery-necked Nightjar on the East African list), and then Copper Sunbirds and the rest of the avian population realised it was dawn and let loose in a glorious dawn chorous. We were desperately trying to identify all that we could (and struggling since we were all new to that side of Kenya). Even so we picked up the Leaflove soon, Winding Cisticola, Grey-capped Warbler, African Pygmy Kingfisher, White-crested Turaco, and as the morning progressed some other real specialities including Honey Buzzard, Compact Weaver, a possible Beaudouin's Snake Eagle, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike, Green Crombec and so on. A Grasshopper Buzzard glided past at c. 80 ft altitude giving classic views — fantastic, and the first record for western Kenya! We had a cassette recorder and microphone with us and recorded a few calls which we have since been able to identify back at base — the best being Red-chested Flufftail. We dipped badly on a few species including the Blue Swallow (whose roost site is becoming smaller and smaller as shambas encroach on it... though it was a bit late in the year for them too) and Locustfinch (a tiny wee thing that may be hard to track down unless you know exactly where to find it). By 10:30 am things were quietening down and we headed back to camp for some (by now sour!) milk and a delicious slice or two of bread with the remains of tinned chillied Chinese cabbage, adding African Blue Flycatcher and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird to the list as we ate.

From there, a mad dash to the border town of Busia and along a murram road that follows the border with Uganda north to Malaba, the next border crossing 30-40 km away. By now it was stinking hot, but we still managed to see Black Bishop, Black-headed Gonolek, a Great Snipe (a rare Palaearctic migrant and

my first for Kenya), and a Croaking Cisticola. Not a lot was moving by now and it was therefore a swift drive north watching for anything perched on the telegraph wires (Long-crested Eagle, Augur Buzzard etc.) to the agricultural town of Kitale. By now we were beginning to feel the effects of the pace a bit but still going. We circled the small village of Kiminini searching hard for Heuglin's Masked Weaver — only known from this part of the country — but in vain. A few weaver nests that could have been theirs, but no birds. A brief stop in Kitale for more bread and milk (what a great diet!) and then on to Sirikwa Guest House near the Cherangani Mountains and the legendary Kongelai Escarpment — an amazing number of species occur only there in Kenya. Sirikwa Guest House is a beautiful place, an old farm house set in a garden surrounded with old forest trees, lawns and bright flower beds and as a result, loads of birds. It belongs to Mrs Jane Barnley who operates it as a camp site and small guest house, with guests having delicious meals in the house with her. There's another legend there, Maurice Sinyereri, the incredibly knowledgeable resident bird guide. We arrived at around six in the evening in time for a cup of tea before heading out with Maurice to try and scoop up some nightjars on the roads. This was a dismal failure as the roads were full of people returning from market and it was also very dry, not encouraging birds to sit on the road as they do during the rains. No worries... back to a amazing English-style dinner (another first for Xu) and stories of life in pre-war Kitale when the Barnleys first moved there - very little cultivation at all (it's totally covered in maize fields now); instead, grass and *Acacia* trees and masses of elephant, lion, buffalo, giraffe etc. They generously put us up in their spacious tents, pitched on a stone base with a thatch roof and comfortable beds — very nice, and hard to get out of at 5:10 am the next day!

Still, we were away by 5:30 am on Sunday heading 40 or so km along rough back roads to Kanyarkwat, another legendary site (there's lots of legends in this area!) right on the Ugandan border at the base of Mt Elgon. This is the only known site in Kenya for Foxy Cisticola and White-breasted Cuckoo-Shrike and is one of the best places for Boran Cisticola, Orange-winged Pytilia, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Heuglin's Masked Weaver, Black-billed Barbet and Lesser Blue-eared Starling, just to mention a few. We arrived there just as the sun was rising, in totally beautiful golden light with incredible views looking north and west to some dramatic hills just inside Uganda, as well as Mt Elgon right there above us and yet again a fantastic dawn chorus. We had to report first to an army outpost which is there to try and keep cattle thieves from Uganda out of the area — cattle rustling remains a problem in that part of the world. The whole area immediately to the north is like no-mans land with no-one there at all because of the fear of raiding. As a result, the grass is as tall as a man, all golden yellow at

the time and stunning in the bright sun with the wind blowing it into ripples of gold. And then the BIRDS... just incredible. Even as we were waiting for the army commander to come to talk to us (in a T-shirt and shorts and chewing a red tooth-brush) there were Heuglin's Masked Weavers building nests (so we got it after all!) and Lesser Blue-eared Starlings in the tree over the office! We saw a LOT of the specialities for the area, many of them lifers for us including the two we were really hoping to see, the Foxy Cisticola (a lovely little rufous cisticola and one of the easier ones to id) and the Orange-winged Pytilia, but we also had Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Black-billed Barbet, Brown-backed Woodpecker, and Brown Babblers, amongst others. We didn't clean up completely, dipping badly on the White-breasted Cuckoo-Shrike which I was really hoping to see and the Black Tit which should also occur there, as well as Green-backed Eremomela which at other times can be quite common there. However, it was just a joy to be out in such a beautiful place and seeing such awesome birds! From there (having had a scrumptious picnic lunch prepared by Mrs Barnley) we headed back to a swamp set further back from the Kongelai escarpment to pick up another local specialty, Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird. Here we also found a Banded Snake Eagle sitting in a tree and peering down into the water below it as if it was trying to decide whether its reflection really WAS what it looked like.

Lastly, in the three hours before sunset, we made a dash for the famous Kongelai escarpment to get Yellow-billed Shrike, Black-cheeked Waxbill, more White-crested Turacos, Double-toothed Barbet and the local race of Rattling Cisticola. We got them all, but missed the Stone Partidge that (every other day) normally call at dusk at the base of the scarp. It was a great way to finish the day though, sitting on a rock part way up the escarpment looking north into 'the hot country' with its flat plains broken by jagged hills, in the fading evening light with the wonderful sound of White-crested Turacos and a band of Brown Babblers going to roost. Just as it got dark, several African Scops Owls started calling and a Freckled Nightjar landed on a rock overhanging the road 20 m away, called briefly, and then sat there for a minute or so before flitting off to start foraging — beautiful. So it was back to the Barnleys' for another stunning English dinner of roast chicken and steamed pudding followed by more stimulating conversation and at last a welcome sleep — the end of World BirdWatch '97 (or at least the official bit — we did spend several hours the next morning trying to find Spotted Creeper, sadly without success!).

The final outcome of the weekend for us was 219 species recorded on the two days of official watching (and about another 25 or so on the journey to and fro) which we were pretty chuffed with. We all had a load of new species and had a LOT of fun in the process too! — *Colin Jackson, P O Box 383 ,Watamu.*

Head in the clouds in the Aberdares and Kinangop

Only about half awake, in pre-dawn darkness on 4 October, Muchane Muchai and I left the farm in North Kinangop were we had spent the night. Our task — to track down the highland 'specials' of Kinangop and the Aberdares and make sure they made it on to the World Birdwatch list. Today we were heading for the mountains. As the light gathered, an early Rufous-naped Lark flew up from the road in surprise and birds began to move and call. Soon Muchai was busy scribbling down names as we bumped and lurched along the dusty track: Hunter's Cisticola bubbling in duet, a distant honking of Hadada Ibis, the harsh croaks of Cape Rooks. Daylight also revealed an unpromising spectacle in the distance — the Aberdares shrouded from top to bottom in dense, grey rain clouds.

We had cleverly taken a short-cut to avoid a stretch of the spine-jarring main road to Ndunyu Njeru, which is particularly agonising in an old Hilux pick-up. It seemed like a good idea, and indeed would have been if I hadn't managed to take a wrong turn and driven 20 km in the wrong direction (down an even more spine-jarring stretch of track) before realising that Something Wasn't Quite Right. So it was bump-bump-*thump*-bump all the way back and round, with the clock ticking away, no birds in sight and no sign of the clouds dispersing either. Eventually regaining the main road, we stopped just after Murungaru town in a swampy valley and added Sharpe's Longclaw, Grassland Pipit and Red-capped Lark. No less than six different species of hirundines appeared in an old gravel quarry just beyond and our spirits started to pick up along with the list.

More bump-bump-bump, with pauses to follow up on interesting blobs in the distance, to Ndunyu Njeru (at which stage the track to the Aberdares gives up the pretence of being a proper road entirely). We stopped in a damp depressing drizzle at the edge of the forest reserve, in open land with a few patches of juniper, to look and listen. Despite the weather, here were Golden-winged and Malachite Sunbirds, Grey and Chestnut-throated Apalis, and Mountain Yellow Warbler. Then it was a slow climb up the slope, pausing here and there in the enveloping cloud to try and pick up a movement or a call. The western scarp of the Aberdares is much steeper than the eastern, so the road only passes through a short stretch of forest, much of which is in fact bamboo — not rich in birds even in the best of weather. Nonetheless, the list was piling up, with Eastern Double-collared Sunbird and Brown Woodland Warbler singing away, flocks of Yellow-bellied Waxbills flitting along the verges and coveys of Jackson's Francolin (one of our special target species) scurrying off into the mist.

A pleasant surprise awaited at the top, as the cloud rolled away and glittering sunbirds flitted about sipping from the *Kniphofia* flowers. We added Tacazze

Sunbird to the list and presented the KWS officer at the gate with some World Birdwatch stickers. To our dismay, he looked rather bemused and asserted that he knew nothing about the event. With great efficiency, though. he placed a quick radio call to park headquarters, established our *bona fides*, and in no time we were waved through.

Now we were up on the moorland proper. Mountain Chats perched confidingly by the road, flashing their white tail feathers, and a Green Sandpiper and a pair of African Black Ducks bobbed about on a weed-covered stream. Our target bird here was Aberdare Cisticola and, suddenly, there they were! — only a few kilometres into the park, a little group in a patch of dry tussock grass at the edge of the *Erica* scrub. We feasted our eyes and ears and finally drove on, feeling that the day could only be downhill from here. A long circuit around the moorland indeed yielded very little new. Moorland Francolins proved elusive and all the buzzards were ordinary Augurs, rather than the Mountain we were hoping for. Taking a late lunch at the Queen's Cave waterfall we watched Slender-billed Chestnut-winged Starlings having an afternoon splash — but no sign, alas, of the African Green Ibis that are supposed to nest here once in a while. A last attempt on Mountain Buzzard at the Gura and Karura Falls yielded dividends, as a splendid specimen floated across above us, calling loudly. But the clouds were closing in again and it was time to go.

Sunday morning back on the farm was more relaxed — taking a 'late' breakfast, at around 6:00, we chalked up a dozen or so new calls while sipping our tea, including Dusky Turtle Dove and Yellow-crowned Canary. Dominic Kaburu and a friend from Ruteere School Wildlife Club joined us in exploring the woodland at the escarpment edge, which yielded Red-throated Wryneck, Brown Parisoma, Black-throated Wattle-eye and Northern Double-collared Sunbird, an Ayres's Eagle and a Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk overhead. Then it was time to knuckle down to the real work of the day — the search for Jackson's Widowbird and Wing-snapping Cisticola. We didn't have much hope for the widowbird, given the pathetically dry conditions and the fact that no-one had seen them around recently. But the cisticola surely would turn up — or would it? After hours and hours and hours of tramping across desiccated pasture, with scarcely a blade of grass in sight, we weren't so sure. Finally, as we limped along one flank of Kimani Mbae dam, a tiny, almost tail-less bird flew up from a little clump of tussock grasses and landed about 40 m away. The cisticola — at last!

All the day, Kinangop seemed to be alive with birdwatchers. As well as groups from the 'Friends of Kinangop Plateau', we encountered several teams of students with their notebooks and pencils. The birds at the dam must have wondered what on earth was going on, as one birding group replaced another in

quick succession. It was wonderful to see so many people spending a day out watching birds and feeling part of the event.

The swampy area at the dam outlet produced African Snipe, a fine group of Levaillant's Cisticola and a big flock of Long-tailed Widowbirds, while Black-winged Plovers flew about with high-pitched cries nearby. This seemed a good point to retire, and we did so, dusty and footsore, for a well-earned cup of tea. As the shadows thickened over the Rift Valley came the liquid, haunting call of a Montane Nightjar — and the last species for our World Birdwatch list. — *Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Water Thick-knee — *Edwin Selempo*

Birding in the Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba National Reserves

Dave Richards
P O Box 24545, Nairobi

For years these three Reserves, on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River in northern Kenya, have attracted visitors to view the wildlife, particularly the endangered Grevy's Zebra, elegant Gerenuk, beautiful Reticulated Giraffe, herds of Beisa Oryx and the peaceful herds of Elephant bathing in the Ewaso Nyiro River. And not forgetting the big cats — Lion, Leopard and Cheetah — which can all be seen here on a visit of a few short days. The altitude of the Reserves ranges from 850 m -1,250 m and the climate is hot and dry, with an annual rainfall averaging around 350 mm. The rains, which in some years can be very heavy, making driving difficult, fall mainly during April and November. The dominant habitat consists mainly of thorny scrubland, with areas of *Acacia tortilis*, but along the Ewaso Nyiro River there is an ever-shrinking band of riverine vegetation consisting of *Acacia elatior*, Tana River Poplar *Populus ilicifolia* and the distinctive Doum Palm — the only palm tree in the world with a divided trunk. Apart from the river, the Reserves are generally well-watered, having a number of small permanent streams and waterholes and a few swamps, all of which attract wildlife, including birds, particularly when the Ewaso Nyiro dries up. The birdlife in this wonderful area is spectacular with such specialities as Pygmy Falcon, Somali Bee-eater, Golden-breasted Starling, Vulturine Guineafowl, Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse, Somali Courser (split recently from Cream-coloured Courser) and Donaldson-Smith's Sparrow-Weaver all easily seen. Other notable birds occurring here are White-headed Mousebird, Pygmy Batis, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Bare-eyed Thrush, Pink-breasted and Fawn-coloured Larks, Golden Pipit and Somali Golden-breasted Bunting. Something like 400-plus species have been recorded.

The Samburu National Reserve, at 165 km^2 the smallest of the three Reserves, lies to the north of the Ewaso Nyiro River and west of the Isiolo-Marsabit road. The land rises gently from the river to the base of several steep, rocky hills, on one of which a pair of Verreaux's Eagles regularly nest. The scrubland below the hills is a good place to find Somali Bee-eater and Yellow-billed Hornbill, Spotted Thick-knee and Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, whilst upstream from Samburu Lodge Bristle-crowned and Golden-breasted Starlings can often be found feeding on the fruits of the Henna bush *Lawsonia inermis*. Sitting in any of

the taller trees are likely to be Eastern Pale-chanting Goshawk, the tiny Pygmy Falcon, or even a Martial Eagle. Martials often prey on Vulturine Guineafowl, and I once came across one mantling over an adult Kori Bustard in this area. A good place to find Vulturine Guineafowl is just a few kilometres downstream from Samburu Lodge where they seem to have lost all fear of vehicles and can be watched and photographed quite easily. This area is also a good spot to see the tiny Crested Francolin and the very common Yellow-necked Spurfowl. The grounds of Samburu Lodge are good for birds such as Rufous Chatterers and Spotted Morning Thrush, and more unusual species like Narina Trogon and Hartlaub's Turaco have been recorded there in the past. If visiting the Lodge

Somali Bee-eater — *Edwin Selempo*

during the day, take a look over the river to the Leopard bait, where it is not unusual to see a Palm-nut Vulture feeding on any leftover meat. Along the river banks look for Water Thick-knee, Spur-winged and Three-banded Plovers, and the odd migrant wader — Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper. The lodge is also a good spot for weavers, with both Black-headed and Golden Palm Weavers nesting in the trees here during the rains.

The Buffalo-Springs National Reserve (131 km^2) lies due south of Samburu National Reserve and consists mainly of a gently rolling plain with areas of *Acacia tortilis*. This reserve is well watered by the Isiolo and Ngare Mara rivers, the Buffalo Springs themselves and, of course, the Ewaso Nyiro River. Here, look out for Black-capped Social Weavers, Donaldson-Smith's Sparrow-Weaver and the ever present White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, without forgetting the showy White-headed Buffalo-Weavers whose untidy stick nests are often taken over by Pygmy Falcons. The drier areas of this reserve are the places to look for Pink-breasted and Fawn-coloured Larks. The Pink-breasted can usually be found singing from the tops of bushes or small trees whilst the Fawn-coloured are mostly found on the ground. In the riverine woodland look for Verreaux's Eagle Owls which roost during the day high in the larger trees. In contrast, the tiny Pearl-spotted Owlet is usually found lower down in the thicker bush, where it is often mobbed by Grey-headed Sparrows and Slate-coloured Boubous. Any imitation of the owlet's call will usually bring this small owl into view and often a host of other birds which come to mob the 'bird' making the call. This area is also good for Grey-headed Kingfisher, Lilac-breasted and Rufous-crowned Rollers, and White-bellied Go-away-Bird.

Along the open banks of the river you will find White-throated and Little Bee-eaters — the White-throated have occasionally nested here too. The Springs area is a good place to focus on with African Darter and Long-tailed Cormorant often seen. Chestnut-bellied and Black-faced Sandgrouse come to the water around 8:30 to 9:00 most mornings whilst the rarer Lichtenstein's, in contrast, arrive in the late afternoon. The best place to find the Somali Courser is the open grassland area near the Springs where there are many vehicle tracks, often making it easy to drive up quite close to them. If the coursers are not in this area during your visit, drive away from the springs and check out the large area of open, dry grassland to the south. However, there are fewer tracks here and so finding the birds can be very difficult. Another speciality in this area is the Red-necked Falcon, which can sometimes be seen sitting on one of the many Doum Palms, with which the species is often associated.

Spotted Thick-knee — *Edwin Selempo*

One of my favourite areas is along the Ngare Mara River, with its reedbeds and many marshy pools. Here one can find Green-backed Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, White-browed Coucal, Malachite Kingfisher and Black Crake, plus (at the right time of the year) many migrant waders. Most years there is at least one migrant Great Snipe present. In 1997 thousands of Chestnut Weavers and Chestnut Sparrows nested along the river in this same area. All the activity attracted the attention of several Gabar Goshawks which spent their time raiding the nests, causing panic among the nesting birds.

Shaba National Reserve (239 km^2) is south of the Ewaso Nyiro River but on the eastern side of the Isiolo-Marsabit road. It is very different from the other two reserves, as here the Ewaso Nyiro flows through narrow gorges and the generally flat landscape is dominated by the brooding presences of Mt Bodech and Shaba Hill. There are many springs and swamps but most of them contain bitter-tasting water. Although most of the birds already

Map of Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba National Reserves *(by Peter Njoroge)*

mentioned occur here, they do not appear to be as common or as plentiful as in the other Reserves. Specialities occurring here are Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse (most frequently seen during the rains at pools of rain water on the roads), Fan-tailed Raven, Lanner Falcon, Crested Bustard and occasionally African Swallow-tailed Kites. At the Shaba Sarova Lodge, you can get about the best views possible of Bristle-crowned Starlings which fearlessly come to the bird table. Orange-bellied Parrots are often feeding in the trees by the lodge along the river bank — which also hold Eurasian Golden Orioles during the migration. At this time too, it is possible to see Olivaceous Warblers in the *Acacia* scrub around the lodge, and after a heavy storm, if there has been an emergence of termites, keep an eye out for migrant falcons (Eurasian Hobbies are the most likely, but Sooty Falcons are not out of the question). Shaba is the most accessible site for the rare and enigmatic Williams's Lark (see elsewhere in this issue).

Where to stay

Samburu N.R. has one lodge, Samburu Lodge, and two permanent tented Camps, Samburu Intrepids Club and Larsen's. There also is a public camp site and a number of private camp sites.

Buffalo Springs N.R. has two lodges: the Samburu Serena, situated in the far west of the Reserve on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro, and Buffalo Springs Lodge, which is ideally situated in the centre of the Reserve by a permanent spring.

Shaba N.R. has just one lodge, the Shaba Sarova Lodge, built among a number of permanent natural springs along the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River.

Getting there

Visiting these reserves really requires your own transport. The road from Nairobi to Isiolo is generally good, but the road from Isiolo to the Reserve entrance gates is badly corrugated. The roads and tracks in the Reserves are mostly reasonable, and a few have even been graded recently. Four-wheel drive is not really necessary (except in the rains), but a vehicle with good ground clearance is advisable. Fuel is available at Samburu Lodge though it is cheaper in Isiolo.

A last note

There are many good birding spots en route to these Reserves which may tempt you to stop — and are often well worth pausing for. One that is certainly worth a stop is along the road between Timau and Isiolo. During October and November, migrant Pallid and Montagu's Harriers can often be seen flying low over the

wheat fields, while Steppe and Tawny Eagles perch on the fence posts on the look out for rodents. Recently ploughed fields or pasture often have impressively large flocks of White Storks or Abdim's Storks feeding on them. This area is also good for Dusky Turtle Doves, which often crowd the telephone wires along the roadside.

Bristle-crowned Starling — *Edwin Selempo*

The birds of prey of Ololokwi

Simon Thomsett
P O Box 42818, Nairobi

The mountain of Ololokwi, or Ol Donyo Sabache, is commonly seen on calendars, brochures, and paintings. It provides a magnificent back drop to Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba National Reserves. Ololokwi refers more to the region than the mountain, which is locally called Sabache. Despite being so far north, it is (to most people's surprise) almost smack in the middle of Kenya.

Rising to some 1,880 m, Sabache is an isolated basalt mountain lying south of an almost continuous range of mountains that stretches into Ethiopia. It receives sufficient rainfall on its summit to support a cedar, podocarpus and cycad forest. It is accessible only up one side, because three-quarters of its circumference is sheer cliff wall.

For those interested in raptors Ololokwi is alluring. It is difficult to imagine another mountain more ideal for birds of prey, in particular the cliff dwellers. It is strategically well placed for migrant raptors following the rift valley from the north, and it is their last stop before the challenging flight across the hot plains. This 'bottleneck' effect need not apply only to the migrants, but also to our resident raptors undertaking local movements.

Since 1981 I have climbed it 25 times and wandered its foothills and lesser mountains for a combined period of months. In 1991 the Peregrine Fund started a conservation and research programme in Kenya in association with the National Museums' Ornithology Department. I gratefully received sorely needed funding and was given the pleasant task of identifying an important bird of prey region. I spent not a cent in finding it, because Ol Donyo Sabache could not be beaten.

To the raptor the most obvious feature of this area is the numerous cliffs. Sabache itself has a cliff wall 14 km in circumference and in places nearly 500 m high. This cliff is covered with whitewash from probably thousands of years of Rüppell's Griffon Vulture occupation. This feature can be seen from 80 km away on the slopes of Mt Kenya with the unaided eye. Within 10 km it is surrounded by other mountains with yet more cliff faces. All these cliffs are home to falcons, eagles and vultures.

The top plateau of Sabache covers some 9 km^2 of which 5 km^2 is forested. The diversity of the area is dramatic. I once witnessed a Peregrine Falcon rocket out of thick cold moist jungle in pursuit of a forest dwelling African Green Pigeon. The pigeon banked and escaped, and the falcon pulled up on the edge of

the precipitous cliff and then stooped like a meteor down the cliff face until her speed and distance almost baffled my eyes. She broke through a group of doves on the arid scrub hundreds of metres below. In one hunting flight lasting less than 30 seconds she had covered vastly different habitats. This is the principal reason why Sabache has so many species of raptors.

I have recorded on the mountain and on its foothills 62 species of diurnal birds of prey and nine species of owls. Not bad when you consider Kenya has in total 75 diurnal birds of prey and 16 owls. Ololokwi has a greater raptor species diversity than the entire USA!

In the forest and glades on top of Sabache one can see forest dwelling accipiters and eagles. There is an abundance of accipiters, some of which are notoriously difficult to tell apart. Of special interest are the Ovampo Sparrowhawk and Shikra, and the migrant Levant and European Sparrowhawk. My most intriguing find was a good long view of an adult European Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* flying high above skirting the forest fringes. As this is a first record for Kenya, and the entire region I really needed to take photographs to convince anyone to believe me.

The large falcons are exceptionally diverse. The African Peregrine Falcon is densely packed with six pairs in less than 14 km. The Barbary Falcon is seen sufficiently frequently and throughout the year to raise suspicions that it is a resident. The pint-sized Taita Falcon makes its presence all too clear to the local Peregrines by its bold and aggressive nature. Although not much larger than a kestrel, this powerfully built falcon has been seen to chase Peregrines and Lanners away from what I presumed was its nest site. Unfortunately the pair of Taitas took up residence in a deep pot-hole under an over-hang. Despite lowering myself down a rope I could not see into this hole and had to give up the climb.

Migrant falcons are well represented, especially during the rains. The large and pale Saker Falcon has been seen on the summit and on the plains below. The rare Eurasian/Russian *calidus* Peregrine sub-species has also been seen, on one occasion with its smaller African relative in hot pursuit. When the termite alates take wing the skies are full of the smaller falcon migrants. A special treat was to observe in a mixed flock of Lesser Kestrels and Eastern Red-footed Falcons about half a dozen Fox Kestrels. These odd kestrels breed in a broad belt stretching from West Africa to Sudan, and had little reason to be this far south with foreign falcons.

During this time Steppe Buzzards and Honey Buzzards are especially common. In the 'autumn' passage steady streams of mixed flocks fly below the summit heading southward, frequently accompanied by Steppe Eagles.

The eagle population is impressive. The African Hawk Eagle and Ayres's Hawk Eagle used to be familiar inhabitants of the summit's cool forests. The magnificent African Crowned Eagle used to breed in a huge nest in a dominant cedar. But since 1984 the African Crowned Eagles have vanished, probably because of the lethal drought of that year and the subsequent years of misuse and fires on Sabache. Still present are the Verreaux's Eagles. It is possible to see as many as three separate pairs at one time, all patrolling their territories and putting on perfect acrobatic shows. In the drainage lines below, Martial Eagles, Tawny Eagles and Bateleurs nest. All visit the summit and fly by at, or below, one's level. To witness an eagle only 50 m away looking down hundreds of metres with so impressive a back drop is a unique insight into their domain.

Perhaps the least raved-about raptor group comes into its own element here and leaves one wondering why it seldom attracts fanatical admirers. The Rüppell's Griffon Vulture is described in Lewis & Pomeroy's *Bird Atlas of Kenya* as occurring on Ololokwi in thousands. From the bottom looking up one can just make out tiny birds aloft in impressive numbers. After the three hour hot, hearty climb you are at face level with unsurpassed fliers. They cruise by tilting their heads to view their insignificant guest. There is a huge flat boulder which sticks out over the main cliff like a swimming pool spring board. Gingerly sliding your bottom out to the edge, you can dangle your feet over hundreds of metres of strangely inviting abyes. Here you can view vultures soaring above, level, behind and below. You look out upon (at first sight) miles and miles of unspoiled Africa. Groups of vultures will play 'follow my leader' and come at you borne aloft on the hot rising wind to shoot out one after another at your very feet. Individuals will tuck in their wings and reach impressive speeds, in the process creating a loud rushing sound. If there are no eagles or falcons to watch, the vultures are no less awe inspiring. But there are not thousands now, and I doubt there ever were. Instead there are between 30 and 120 Rüppell's. Egyptian Vultures are also plentiful, with three pairs nearly always in view from the main cliff. The Lammergeyer was present in 1981, and it was exceptionally white, but I had not seen it before nor has it appeared since. However, it may well have been a wanderer.

In the valley forest where I camp is a huge Mackinder's Eagle Owl. I hear him at night as I lie awake listening to the leopards grunting, or a friendly porcupine rummaging through my back pack. He isn't very nice, for he eats an inordinate number of raptors. This huge owl devoured two Steppe Buzzards and a small accipiter, and once waited patiently for an African Harrier Hawk to rear its single young before consuming it. Mackinder's Eagle Owls are not supposed to occur in the area.

Taita Falcon — *Simon Thomsett*

Even more interesting is the sighting of a tall thin owl with very long ears, perched on a boulder above windswept tussock grass. He was not the Spotted Eagle Owl which is common on the hills beneath and I am prepared to swear that he was an African Long-eared Owl. But as this species occurs only in the sub-alpine areas of the Rwenzoris and Mt Kenya and is very rare, I would have to have better evidence than this one sighting.

There is no doubt that Sabache alone supports an extraordinary number of raptors. Its geographical position and varied habitats account for this. The hot plains below have many drainage lines with tall trees suitable for breeding birds of prey. But the region is by no means pristine and it has lost some of its raptors, most notably the African Crowned Eagle. In 1984 Ololokwi suffered a drought. The increased number of cattle and goats, artificially augmented by new bore holes, ate most of the available fodder on the plains, and they were then taken to the top of the mountain. Deliberately-lit fires ravaged the hill sides and summit in the mistaken belief that this would bring rain, eradicate ticks and improve grazing. The cedar trees on the forest fringes died. The springs dried up, killing

the entire Cape Buffalo herd, and most of the Bushbuck, Suni, and even the Lesser and Greater Kudu. Rhino also died, but fortunately some were rescued and taken away. Cattle died in thousands and the local people were impoverished. Since then there has been a similar pattern repeated each year, with little grazing forcing cattle to the top of the mountain, and fires. Elders lament the irresponsibility of the young *moran* who light the fires. Since 1995 the valley that holds the Mackinder's Eagle Owl, African Harrier Hawk and former African Crowned Eagle's site has been so repeatedly torched that undergrowth has been removed and it is unlikely that the trees will survive.

The drying up of the mountain is indicated by the distribution of Ololokwi's near-endemic plant. the small African Violet-like *Streptocarpus exsertus*. Previously described as occurring half-way up the mountain, it is today confined to its summit.

Perhaps the most important feature of this otherwise sad forest is the density and size of the cycads, *Encephalartos tegulaneus*. Fortunately fire-resistant, these trees can reach a total height of 17 m and a girth of 4 m. In places these primitive trees dominate and may achieve a density greater than that found anywhere else. The cones and female seed pods are eaten by the young *moran*. To get at them, the palm-like fronds are cut away and the tree may die as a result.

Despite Ol Donyo Sabache's apparent inaccessibility and sanctuary its forest and resources have been over-utilized within the last decade. There are plans to develop the region by paving the road and expanding the ranching. In so fragile a habitat, already suffering from greatly diminished capacity to hold animals, it is likely that the region's natural fauna and flora will continue to decline. It is unfortunate that these natural resources are not recognised as essential, valuable assets that need to be nurtured for perpetuity.

In modern Kenya conservation of natural resources is an economic and political issue. Few options are available to justify the conservation of wildlife and natural fauna unless it creates employment. Even fewer options are available to us to make this money, apart from tourism. The potentially negative affects of tourism are recognised today and this gave rise to the term 'eco-tourism', which indicates culturally and environmentally sensitive visitors. Ololokwi and Ol Donyo Sabache may lose its appeal to most of us if it becomes a tourist destination. I do not believe conventional tourism alone, as we know it today, will so benefit the local communities as to make significant contributions to the conservation of wildlife and to the marked improvement of local living standards. What is clear is that wildlife and raptors are losing ground. We need to do something very different from what we do today in order to keep our wildlife outside protected areas.

Records

compiled by Colin Jackson
PO Box 383, Watamu

This section exists for the publication of interesting observations and for updates to *A Bird Atlas of Kenya* (Lewis & Pomeroy, 1989). All contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for *Kenya Birds*, please consider the following guidelines. For (non-breeding) records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations with notes that you think are of interest (e.g. earliest/latest dates for Palaearctic and intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area, or any unusually large or impressive movements of birds). We are keen to publish information of this kind. Records with information other than simply a list of birds are particularly interesting and valuable, e.g. "male singing from bush", or "4 seen in flock of Barn Swallows...", or "single adult and 2 immatures roosting with other terns" etc. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. *All* records are useful for supplementing the computerised database of the Bird Atlas held in the Dept. of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, through which our knowledge of bird distribution and seasonality in Kenya will be improved.

For breeding records, those for *confirmed* breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of *probable* breeding (nest-building, courtship etc.) are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. For definitions and codes of 'confirmed' and 'probable' breeding, see *Kenya Birds* 5(2), p. 82. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. You are strongly urged to fill in a Nest Record Card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published alongside the Annual Bird Report by the Bird Committee in *Scopus*.

For all records, including breeding records, please be as detailed as possible about dates and locations. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these as we update *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication (see *Kenya Birds* 4(2), p. 84 for suggestions on how to submit a record). Records of certain species are requested in particular for inclusion in this report. These species are indicated in the new *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (EANHS 1996, available for KSh 100/= from the EANHS office) and records should be sent to the Records Officer at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya. For particularly unusual sightings, supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the Rarities Committee of the EANHS for the record to be accepted.

Key to records

For new atlas records, the species number as given in the atlas is placed in brackets after the name: e.g. Whinchat (A# 653). The new records themselves are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres,** present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf,** confirmed breeding; **post conf,** confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. [conf 25B] indicates that the species is confirmed as breeding (and is therefore also present) in square 25B. All records are from 1997 unless otherwise indicated. Where scientific names are not stated (here and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow the *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (3rd edition), EANHS, Nairobi 1996.

Overview

1997 will no doubt be remembered for the extremes in climate that it brought. The year started with the drought which lasted until April and was followed, in many areas, by very heavy rains creating a large number of seasonal wetlands that stayed for some time — and were then replenished when *el niño* struck even later in the year. The seasonal wetlands so created provided ideal foraging and breeding habitat for a number of infrequently-seen intra-African migrants as well as local birds. As a result, and with the tireless searching by certain self-confessed 'crake-fanatics', there were a good number of records of flufftails (of most note, Streaky-breasted Flufftail), migrant crakes and many Lesser Moorhen (found on every patch of seasonal flooding around Thika at least) including adults with young. Endashant Swamp, a seasonal swamp in the Rift Valley behind the Ngong Hills (near the Rifle Range) filled up really nicely producing areas of flooded grassland and swamp — perfect habitats for water birds and particularly crakes. It was visited by a several Nairobi-based birders (and ringers) and turned up Striped Crake, African Crake, Lesser Moorhen, Dwarf Bittern, Maccoa Duck (did they breed there?) and several breeding birds including Black-necked Grebes and African Spoonbills. It was also in some bushed grassland close to the swamp that at least two Bush Pipits were seen, another scarce (EANHS category 'B') species, though it is known to occur in this area from time to time. The second Striped Crake record — caught in a banda at Koobi Fora not all that far from the Sudanese border in June — is a particularly interesting record. It raises the question of where this bird was on its way to or from, it being a) nearly 600 km further north than any other previous record in Kenya and b) not exactly in a nice swampy wetland. Was it just a vagrant that was lost, or could it be that there is a small population that spend the non-breeding season in the wetlands to the north of Lake Turkana in southern Sudan...?

Also during the rains, a pair of White-backed Night Herons was found at the Hippo Pools in Nairobi National Park, apparently attempting to breed though the

nest was washed away by some very high floods. A further attempt also failed, due possibly to disturbance by people going too close too often. This heron, often considered as very rare and localised, is certainly scarce and, being nocturnal as well as very shy and secretive, is a very hard species to find. Another species which these days has become rare is our local race of the Great Crested Grebe, the reduction in numbers thought to be largely due to the use of gill-nets for fishing on the lakes where the grebe used to occur. The record of nine birds on Lake Oloidien was therefore very unusual and raises the question of these birds come from, as they are seen very infrequently on Lake Naivasha.

Some interesting and noteworthy observations were made in Meru National Park, in particular the Black-and-white Flycatcher found breeding (the first breeding record in Kenya for 30 years) and the Chestnut-fronted Helmet Shrikes seen along the western edge of the Park, the race which occurs there being particularly scarce and localised these days. Remarkably, it appears that the nest and eggs of Hartlaub's Bustard have never been described. A nest found and monitored on the Athi-Kapiti plains is thus of great interest. A full description is to be published in *Scopus*.

Sabaki River Mouth continued to live up to its legendary status, turning up Sandwich Tern and two species rare at the coast, Pied Avocet and Ruff. Conversely, inland there were records of species normally only found at the coast — Grey Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, and Red-necked Phalarope (which normally winters miles out at sea, though this time was seen inland but away from the Rift Valley lakes where it has turned up a few times in the past). Other rare migrants reported have been the Eurasian Wryneck at Baringo in December 1996 and a Wood Warbler at Mida Creek in March, the wryneck record being about only the 15th for Kenya. It seemed also to be a particularly good year for Temminck's Stint, with at least six being found during the annual waterfowl counts alone. There had also been quite an influx of White Wagtails, with at least 11 recorded again just during the annual waterfowl counts (and all seen at sewage ponds). Two 'spring' records of Sooty Falcons are unusual in that there are very few records of this species on its northward migration.

There have been a significant number of new Atlas records submitted for this issue of Kenya Birds, some of which date back several years — many thanks to those who sent in their old records. One or two areas visited produced large numbers of new records, clearly sites which had never been visited by birders who submitted their observations. An example of this is Kimana Game Sanctuary with the swamp from which a waterfowl count team in January 1997 turned up 31 new Atlas records in under 24 hours! Even common species such as African Jacana, Kittlitz's Plover, Ruff and Common Snipe were new for the atlas square. A good number of new records have also come from the Salt Lick

Game Sanctuary and around the Taita Hills Lodge, clearly another previously under-observed area. A Black-faced Sandgrouse at Mwea National Park is a new atlas record that is some distance out of the species' normal range. It is worth sending in your records even if you think that the species is common in the area you are visiting — it is very possible that it may not have been reported from there before.

Observations: Afrotropical species

Great Crested Grebe: 1 immature bird seen with 9 ads, L. Oloidien, Naivasha, 19/9/96, G&DI; 6 at same site, 31/2, BF — this is a high number of birds for this species whose population has crashed over the past 10-20 years; the immature bird was fully fledged and so could have flown in from a breeding site elsewhere; a pair of this species on Nairobi Dam on 22/5, FN, is an exceptional record and was made not long before the dam became smothered with water hyacinth

Black-necked Grebe (A# 3): [pres 50A] L. Baringo, 22/12/96, WGH — this species can be very numerous on neighbouring L. Bogoria so it is no surprise for one to turn up on L. Baringo; single bird, L. Oloidien, 22/1, MMu; 300+ on L. Bogoria, 30/3, TL, GF — this site is known to attract large numbers of this species; a bird seen with the previous species on Nairobi Dam, 22/5, FN

Great White Pelican: 50 heading east over Thigiri ridge, Nbi, 26/5, MM

Frigatebird sp.: an imm frigatebird, probably a Greater Frigatebird, observed flying northwards along beach, Watamu, 17/3, RDG

Shoebill: probably the same bird as in 1996, reported from Amboseli, 16/7, TC

Little Bittern: 1 on pond near Loresho Ridge, Nbi, 4/6, MM

Dwarf Bittern: L. Bogoria, 30/3, TL, GF; Tsavo East NP, 26/4, AA; at least 1, Endashant Swamp, 1 & 14/6, MM; 1, Gongoni Salt Works, Malindi, 27/6, BF

White-backed Night Heron (A# 28): [pres 75B] a pair of this exquisite and rare heron were present initially at Kitengela in Jan and later at Hippo Pools, Nbi NP, during May and were seen by a number of people. This is the second time it has been recorded here (cf. *Kenya Birds* 3(1), p. 28) though it was inadvertently not listed earlier as an Atlas update. On this occasion, it appeared as if they were going to breed, and indeed were seen sitting on a nest (21/3, CJ, PN, KD); however they were not there a week later and there was clear evidence of relatively large numbers of people having approached quite close to the nest tree, which may well have caused the birds to desert; alternatively, it may have only been a breeding attempt (practice?), as no eggs were ever actually reported. This acts as a reminder to all birders to be extremely careful when viewing nesting birds, as it often does not take much to make them desert. The birds were reported again from the same site 13/4, ND, MP, BF

Little Egret (A# 35): [pres 88D] not uncommon in the swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Western Reef Heron (A# 36): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH; 1 dark morph bird, Ferguson's Gulf, L. Turkana, 29/3, RB

Black Heron: Lake Elmenteita, 10/2, AG; Lake Naivasha, 23/2, MMu; L. Baringo, 28/3, TL, GF

Madagascar Squacco Heron: 1 in Masai Mara, 24/5, DR; 1 on pond, Nbi NP, 8/6, WGH, MM

Rufous-bellied Heron (A# 33): 1 at L. Baringo on 27/12/96 and 3 on 7/3; 10 in Masai Mara, 3/1; [post pres 61A] 5 at Awasi, near Ahero, 1/1, BF

Great Egret (A# 39): [pres 88D] in swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Purple Heron (A# 41): [pres 88D] 3-4 seen in swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Black-headed Heron (A# 43): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Saddle-billed Stork: single bird overhead, Loldia Farm, northern shore of L. Naivasha, 12/6, JWG

Glossy Ibis (A# 56): [pres 88D] several in swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Lesser Flamingo (A# 60): [pres 62D] 2 birds grounded (and later died) in the morning after a huge storm during the night, Kijabe, 12/4, MB — these two must have been moving between lakes in the Rift Valley and got caught up in the storm, but still so little is known about these mysterious birds

White-backed Duck: single bird on L. Oloidien, 22/01, & a pair on the Dam next to Sirikwa Guest House, Kapenguria, 5/02, MMu; 2 pairs on coffee estate dam, Thika, 17/5, MM; 1 on dam, Karura Forest, Nbi, 28/5, WMB

Spur-winged Goose (A# 65): [pres 88D] small numbers in swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Egyptian Goose (A# 64): [pres 88D] around edge of swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Red-billed Teal: 6 birds at Mida Creek on 15/3 make an unusual record for this species which is uncommon at the coast, RDG

Maccoa Duck: c. 500, Kongoni Lake, Naivasha on 13/1 and 730 counted on 17/1, BF & 'large numbers' at Oloidien nearby on 22/1, MMu; up to 1 male and 2 females on Endashant Swamp, 1-14/6, FN, WGH, MM; single bird on Nairobi Dam, 22/5, FN — Such large numbers as at Naivasha in January are unprecedented for a species that is generally considered as declining. Where did these birds come from? And where did they go, as, merely 10 days later during the annual waterfowl count, not even one was observed at the same site?

Bat Hawk: 1 in flight mid-morning, Thika, 5/1, and another over Thigiri Ridge, Nbi at dusk, 2/6, MM; another, Mara Safari Club, Masai Mara NR, 1/6, KB — an uncommon species that is not so often seen due to its crepuscular habits (i.e. active only at dawn and dusk)

African Swallow-tailed Kite: a pair foraging in Hell's Gate NP, late afternoon on 18/2, MV; 3 at Kapedo, 8/3, and 2 on 15/6, BF

Brown Snake Eagle (A# 101): [post pres 61A] Homa Lime, Koru, nr. Kisumu, almost monthly during 1996, NW

Southern Banded Snake Eagle (A# 103): [pres 114C] 1 in Mwazaro area, just north of Shimoni, s. coast, 29/9, FN

Banded Snake Eagle: 1 near Fig Tree Lodge, Masai Mara, 28/8, DR

African Marsh Harrier: Island Camp, L. Baringo, 22/12/96, WGH; 1 over flooded grassland, Thika, 23 & 24/5, MM

African Goshawk (A# 108): [pres 51B] Samburu NR, 25/8/96, WGH — this represents the northern-most edge and lowest altitude of this species' main range in Kenya

Little Sparrowhawk (A# 109): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, & [pres 76C] just north-west of Sultan Hamud, 17/2/95, WGH; single bird flying over the Papyrus, Lake Naivasha, 23/1, & a bird seen perched in CF's Garden in Nbi

Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk: lone bird seen on Ngong Hills, 9/1, DF; a single bird, The Ark, Aberdares NP, 16/5, DR (and seen daily by staff of The Ark)

Grasshopper Buzzard (A# 120): [pres 63A] 3, Naro Moru, 8/12/96, BF; 5, Yuhud dam, Wajir town, 10/3, MM

Wahlberg's Eagle (A# 133): [pres 88C] Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH

Ayres's Hawk Eagle (A# 126): [pres 114B] almost daily over Tudor Creek, Mombasa, Oct-March '95-'97, MR. This is a scarce and local bird, considered to be mostly resident in East Africa, though possibly wandering in the non-breeding season: coastal records have tended to be scarce and irregular — unlike this record. Due to the scarcity of the species, relatively little is known about its movements; southern African birds are thought to move north — but in the southern winter (April-Aug) when this bird is absent from Mombasa. The origin of this bird and the reason behind its regular movements therefore remain a mystery; single ad over Githambwini Dam, Thika, 22/6, CJ, JAL, KD

Martial Eagle (A# 123): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Lanner Falcon (A# 146): [post pres 61A] Homa Lime, Koru, nr. Kisumu, Nov '96, NW; [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

African Hobby: imm feeding on passerine in dead tree, Elsamere, Naivasha, 18/2, MV; 1 capturing insects in air, North Kinangop, 21/6 LAB

Red-necked Falcon: 2 seen near Malindi, 14/7, DAT

Harlequin Quail (A# 174): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Buff-spotted Flufftail: pair Kakamega Forest, 23/6, BF

Red-chested Flufftail: as a result of much intensive searching, MM turned up 1 bird on 5 & 25/1 and at least 7 between 17/5-7/6 in 6 sites around Thika; also 1 singing in reed-swamp, Gigiri, Nbi, 1 & 3/5 and 1-2 calling in response to tape, Nbi University dam, 8/5; also pair calling Saiwa Swamp, 5/2, MMu

Streaky-breasted Flufftail: at 3 sites near Thika — 2 birds singing & a third calling, 17/5; 2 singing, 23/5 and 5 singing, 24/5 at same site; 1 calling, 23/5 and another 24/5 at 2 different sites, MM, WGH; this scarce intra-African migrant was last recorded in July 1990 — the good rains this year clearly created areas of ideal habitat which attracted good numbers of the both this species and several other uncommon intra-African migrant rallids.

African Crake: 3 individuals seen, Masai Mara, 23-24/5, DR; ad bird

flushed several times, Nbi NP, 7/6, MM, WGH; another ad ringed, Endashant Swamp, 14/6, NbiRG

Striped Crake (A#): female flushed from flooded grassland, Endashant Swamp, 1/6, MM, WGH; [pres 4C] adult caught and photographed after flying into a banda, Koobi Fora, L. Turkana, 28/6, DK — a very scarce intra-African migrant that is difficult to see, the latter record being particularly interesting being almost 600 km further north than any previous record in East Africa. Was this merely a vagrant that had overshot its normal wintering grounds, or is there a small population that spends the non-breeding season in southern Sudan?

Allen's Gallinule: Island Camp, L. Baringo, 21-22/12/96, WGH; 2 seen, 24/5, and 8, including 2 imm, on 7/6, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, MM; 3 still present 28/6, OD

Purple Swamphen: at Githumbwini Dam, Thika: 2 on 2/1 and up to 4 in May, MM; 2 at same site 22/6, CJ, JAL, KD; 1 present papyrus swamp north of Thika, 23/5, MM

Lesser Moorhen: to 20 present, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 17/5; imm birds also seen at same site 7/6, MM, and 22/6, JAL, CJ, KD; 1 ad on pond near Langata Forest, Nbi NP, 26/5, MM; 6-7 including imm bird, Endashant Swamp, 25/5, 2/6 & 14/6, FN, CJ, WGH; immature in NNP, 23/6, BF; also observed on L. Baringo, 4-5/8, ChJ — another intra-African migrant that is not often seen but that can be relatively common in a year with good rains (such as this)

African Finfoot: 1 at Malu Camp, Masai Mara, 16/2, RB

Denham's Bustard: a pair by the road, Naro Moru, 3/3, BF — this threatened species is thought to now number less than 300 individuals in Kenya, so all records are of value

Kori Bustard (A# 209): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Crested Bustard (A# 206): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

African Jacana (A# 211): [pres 88D] several seen on swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Lesser Jacana: L. Naivasha, 23/1, MMu

Greater Painted-snipe (A# 213): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; several birds seen including one ringed, Endashant Swamp, 25/5, 2/6 & 14/6, FN, MM, WGH, NbiRG; present on Nairobi Dam, 22/5, FN; single female, Safariland Hotel, L. Naivasha, 31/7, CJ

Pied Avocet: 2 birds at Sabaki River mouth on 19/3 are very unusual as this species is rare along the coast, RDG

Black-winged Stilt (A# 267): [pres 88D] common around edge of swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Spotted Thick-knee (A# 275): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; [pres 15C] Kalacha, Chalbi Desert, Sept. '96, MB

Heuglin's Courser (A# 280): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Temminck's Courser (A# 278): [post pres 88D] single bird near Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, 28/5, CJ

Collared Pratincole (A# 288): [pres 88D] 15-20 birds, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Kittlitz's Plover (A# 234): [pres 88D] not uncommon, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Chestnut-banded Plover (A# 230): [pres 88C] 1 at Amboseli NP, 19/8, DR

Caspian Plover: Game Ranching Co, Athi River, 3/4, WV, TM — common in Masai Mara, this is an uncommonly reported species from the Athi-Kapiti plains

Blacksmith Plover (A# 217): [pres 62C] Game Ranching Co., Athi River, 3/4, WV & TM

Spur-winged Plover: a few birds in grass by water, Nguuni Farm, Bamburi, Mombasa, 8/3, MR

Senegal Plover: 2 near Aitong, Masai Mara, 29/7, DR

Roseate Tern (A# 306): [pres 114A] offshore from Green Oasis Hotel, Msambweni, 19/6, AA

White-cheeked Tern (A# 308): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH

Black-faced Sandgrouse (A# 319): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH — this record is some way out of range for the species which is not known from the upper Tana River area.

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse: a bird at L. Bogoria represents the south-western extreme of this species range, 31/3, KD

Yellow-throated Sandgrouse (A# 322): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ et al

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon: pair in Arboretum, Nbi, 13/4; pair seen Thigiri ridge on both 19/4 and 26/5 and single bird same site, 22/6, MM

Speckled Pigeon (A# 324): [pres 15C] around Kalacha centre, Chalbi Desert, Sept. '96, MB; [pres 88D] Kimana, 19/1, FN, CJ et al

Feral Pigeon (A# 323): [pres 88D] common in Kimana centre, 19/1, FN, CJ et al; [pres 114A] Green Oasis Hotel, Msambweni, 19/6, AA

African White-winged Dove: abundant around Ramu, only a few at Mandera, 23/4, BF

African Grey Parrot: 6 birds observed for 2 minutes playing in top of dead tree, garden of Rondo Retreat Centre, Kakamega Forest, 30/1, MMu

Purple-crested Turaco: pair at Blue Posts Hotel, Thika, 2/3, BF — this rare and restricted turaco is rapidly declining and endangered in Kenya

White-bellied Go-away-bird: NNP, 13/4, ND, MP & BF — a rare bird for the NNP

Great Spotted Cuckoo: at Oltepesi, Magadi-Nbi road, 22/5, SP, EO, HH

Black Cuckoo (A# 366): [pres 91B] Lamu, 22/4, WGH — this species is rare along the Kenya coast

White-faced Scops Owl (A# 384): [pres 50B] observed in *Acacia tortilis* by dry sand lugga, Ol Malu Ranch, Laikipia, 1/1, SS; [pres 75D] heard persistently calling through the night, Melepo Hills, Kajiado, 23/2, CJ, J&JW — this is the first record for this species in Kajiado District and some 100 km from the nearest previous record

African Wood Owl (A# 389): [pres 62D] Kieni Forest, 25/1, WGH, MM, RR

Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar: common and very vocal, Lewa Downs, 19-21/2, BF

Freckled Nightjar: 1+ singing at night along rocky escarpment beside Endashant Swamp13/6, CJ, MM

Gabon Nightjar (A# 408): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH

Slender-tailed Nightjar (A# 406): [pres 62D] a single bird photographed on the ground, Kijabe, 17/4, MB — this observation at c.2,220 m., is one of the highest altitudinal records for this species

Mottled Swift (A# 416): [pres 38C] the only species of swift observed in the area, Suguta River, Kapedo, 31/5, AG

White-rumped Swift (A# 422): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Horus Swift (A# 423): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; several groups seen along Mara River, Masai Mara, 23-24/5, DR

Little Swift (A# 424): [pres 88D] Kimana, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

White-headed Mousebird: at Kurungu, South Horr, 14/11/96, KD, MB; 3-4 birds seen, c. 3 km south of Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr Kimana 28/2, AS, CJ — the latter record represents the less common race *leucocephalus* which is distinct from *turneri* of Samburu and further north

Malachite Kingfisher (A# 434): [pres 88D] not uncommon around swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Madagascar Bee-eater (A# 446): [pres 61C] flock with immatures, Arroket Tea Estate, Sotik, 4/8, IF

Carmine Bee-eater (A# 452): [pres 88D] single bird, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Blue-breasted Bee-eater: 4 on 31/12/96 & 2 on 11/3 at Sio River near Nambale, BF

Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater (A# 444): [pres 52C] c. 5 birds near Kindani River Camp, Meru NP, 30/3, AG — this species is quite common on the Nyambeni hills just to the west of the site these birds were seen

Lilac-breasted Roller (A# 455): [pres 15C] Kalacha, Chalbi Desert, Sept. '96, MB

Rufous-crowned Roller (A# 456): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Green Wood-hoopoe (A# 459): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Southern Ground Hornbill: a single bird in NNP on 13/4 and probably the same individual on 23/4 is unusual for this species, BF, ND, MP

White-eared Barbet: Ziwani Tented Camp, L. Jipe, 28/5, AA

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird (A# 495): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH

Hairy-breasted Barbet: 2 pairs seen, Rondo Retreat Centre / Isecheno area, Kakamega Forest, 25-30/1, MMu

Red-fronted Barbet (A# 482): [pres 62B] Solio Ranch, Laikipia, 15/6, AG

Lesser Honeyguide (A# 501): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Pallid Honeyguide (A# 505): **1 foraging around base of tree, Hippo Pools, NNP, 8/4, BF; single bird, Sekenani Camp, Masai Mara, 5/8, CJ**

Eastern Honeybird (A# 508): [pres 62D] Kieni Forest, 6/9, WGH, MM, JJ

Wahlberg's Honeybird (A# 509): [post pres 88D] single bird, Oloorsikitok hill, Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, 28/5, LAB

Nubian Woodpecker (A# 512): [pres 15C] Kalacha, Chalbi Desert, Sept. '96, MB

Grey Woodpecker (A# 522): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock, Iten, 8/10/95, CK

African Broadbill: 2 birds calling, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, 25/1, DF; pair calling same location, 21/2, MMu; single bird seen displaying, 1 km west of Rondo Forest Retreat, Kakamega, 23/6, DH;

Red-winged Lark (A# 531): [pres 101C] Taita Hills Lodge, 1/6/94, WGH

Somali Short-toed Lark: 6 birds seen at Mt. Suswa, 22/6, BF — this is the first record for this species from the area for 10-15 years.

Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark (A# 547): [pres 91C] 2 or 3 groups of birds seen c.50 km north of Malindi towards Tana River Delta, 14/2, MMu — this is the first record from the coastal lowlands for over 25 years though has been infrequently recorded from the Tana Delta

Plain (Af. Sand) Martin (A# 549): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Grey-rumped Swallow: 2 at Gilgil, 15/5, KB

Blue Swallow: 1 ad at Sio River, near Madende, 19/6, BF

Wire-tailed Swallow (A# 552): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Ethiopian Swallow (A# 554): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH

Red-rumped Swallow (A# 556): [pres 101C] Taita Hills Lodge, 1/6/94, WGH

Mosque Swallow (A# 557): [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock, Iten, 8/10/95, CK

White-headed Saw-wing (A# 565): [pres 49B] seen at Kormor, Kerio Valley, 29/3, MB

Golden Pipit (A# 824): [pres 50C] an unusually western record at L. Bogoria, 31/3, KD, MB

Malindi Pipit (A# 823): [post pres 91B] single bird on Lamu Airstrip, 22-23/4, WGH

Bush Pipit: at least 2 birds watched down to 10 m., near Endashant Swamp, 2/6 and 14/6, CJ, MM, WGH

Pangani Longclaw: Game Ranching Co., Athi River, 3/4, WV & TM; NNP, 13/4, BF, ND, MP — this is an infrequently recorded species on the Athi Plains

Rosy-breasted Longclaw (A# 827): [pres 88C] Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH — an unusual record for this partially nomadic species, some way out of normal range; possibly a wanderer attracted to the water at Amboseli at the end of a very long dry period

Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul: found to be resident along Leopard Cliffs, NNP, BF

Grey-olive Greenbul (A# 629): resident (?) below Leopard Cliffs, NNP, first recorded 23/2, BF

Northern Brownbul: apparently undescribed population along Ewaso Nyiro River, Shombole, early '97, BF

Arrow-marked Babbler (A# 601): [pres 61C] group in garden, Arroket Estate, Sotik, 24/5/96, IF

Brown Babbler (A# 602): [post pres 49D] Eldama Ravine, 7-10/4, MB; also at Kabarnet Hotel, Kabarnet, 9/8, FN

Scaly Babbler: numerous at Ramu in rank scrub, particularly nr Daua River, 23/4, BF

Rufous Chatterer (A# 595): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Scaly Chatterer (A# 596): [pres 75D] many sightings along Magadi Road from first bridge to Olorgesailie, early 1997, BF

Grey-winged Robin: Saiwa Swamp NP, 24/6, DH

Cape Robin-Chat (A# 670): [pres 74C] Sekenani Camp, Masai Mara, 4/8, CJ

Brown-chested Alethe (A# 663): [pres 63B] 1 seen, Meru Forest, 26/12/96, BF

Rüppell's Robin-Chat (A# 667): [post pres 62D] Kieni Forest, 25/1, WGH, MM, RR

White-browed Robin-Chat (A# 666): [pres 51B] Samburu-Buffalo Springs NR, 2/4/94, & [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, & [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH

White-browed Scrub Robin (A# 656): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH

Brown-backed Scrub Robin: pair present Karura Forest, Nbi, April/May, MM; singing male in scrubland just west of Thika, 28/6, FN

Capped Wheatear (A# 636): [pres 63C] Blue Valley area near Rupingazi River, Embu, 10/4, GTN,

Northern Anteater Chat (A# 653): [post pres 49D], Eldama Ravine, 7-10/4, MB

Gambaga Flycatcher: 2, Kerio Valley, 9/3, BF

Chapin's Flycatcher: pair "always in same location just east of Ikuywa Bridge", Kakamega Forest, BF

African Grey Flycatcher (A# 793): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; [pres 62B] Solio Ranch, 15/6, AG

Pale Flycatcher (A# 792): [pres 51B] Samburu-Buffalo Springs NR, 2/4/94, & [pres 52C] Meru NP, 7/4/96, WGH

Lead-coloured Flycatcher: L. Baringo, 28/3, TL, GF — this is an uncommon and infrequently reported species, particularly from Baringo which is on the eastern edge of the range for the nominate race

Broad-tailed Warbler: 1 below Impala Point, NNP, 13/4, BF; a pair, with 1 displaying, scrubby grassland near Thika, 23-24/5, MM — a local and uncommon species that is most common in western Kenya but also known to occur locally around Nbi & Thika.

Red-faced Cisticola (A# 736): [pres 76C] just north-west of Sultan Hamud, 17/2/95, WGH — a small extension of this species' range south-east from the Nairobi area.

Whistling Cisticola: 1, Sio River near Madende Creek, 18/6, BF

Foxy Cisticola: 2 on escarpment near Barnley's, Kitale, 4/4, MM — an uncommon and local species about which very little is known.

Tiny Cisticola (A# 729): [pres 88D] Oloorsikitok hill, Mbirikani (Makutano), nr. Kimana, 28/5, and [pres 75B] in scrub adjacent to Endashant Swamp, 2/6, CJ

Winding Cisticola (A# 740): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Boran Cisticola (A# 728): [pres 26B] Gatab, Mt Kulal, Oct. '96, MB

Ashy Cisticola (A# 724): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Zitting Cisticola (A# 719): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, & [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH — this species seems to have extended it's range south along the coast over the past 10 years or so with it first recorded in QSD 102D in the late '80's, 114B in '93 and now 114A in '95

Desert Cisticola (A# 720): [pres 101C] Taita Hills Lodge, 1/6/94, WGH; [post pres 88D] 1 pair observed near Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr Kimana, 27/5, CJ

Black-collared Apalis (A# 758): [pres 62D] Kieni Forest, 25/1, WGH, MM, RR

Red-fronted Warbler (A# 747):[post pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Grey-capped Warbler (A# 763): [pres 49D] Eldama Ravine, 7-10/4, MB

Yellow-bellied Eremomela (A# 764): [pres 62B] Solio Ranch, Laikipia, 15/6, AG

Buff-bellied Warbler (A# 749): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Brown Parisoma (A# 774): [pres 76A] Chania Swamp, just west of Thika, 15/6, FN

Northern Grey Tit (A# 581): [post pres 88D] 2 birds on eastern side of Oloorsikitok hill, Mbirikani, 28/5, CJ, PN

Spotted Creeper: after a long search, this elusive bird was finally found "creeping" up tree-trunks near Sirikwa Safari Camp, Kapenguria, on 27/6 by DH

Black-and-white Flycatcher: 2 birds were observed near Kindani River Camp, Meru NP, 30/3, AG.

Black-throated Wattle-eye (A# 803): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH

Grey-crested Helmet-Shrike: 4 at Siana Springs, eastern Mara, 4/1, BF — one of the best-known sites for this rare species

Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike (A# 873): [pres 52C] 2 birds of this beautiful species were watched around the campsite, Kindani River, Meru NP, 30/3, AG — a rare species in the forest patches around Meru, these birds would be right on the eastern edge of that population's range.

Taita Fiscal (A# 865): [pres 101C] Taita Hills Lodge, 1/6/94, WGH

Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike (A# 852): [pres 114A] Beachcombers, Msambweni, 8/8/95, WGH

Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike (A# 843): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Pringle's Puffback: Frequent along Magadi Road in *Commiphora* from first bridge to as far as Icross turning but apparently no lower, BF

Green-headed Oriole: observed in Shimba Hills, 10/5, AA — an uncommon and local species, really only found in this locality

Pied Crow (A# 577): [pres 88D] Kimana centre, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Cape Rook (A# 580): [pres 37C] Tartar, Makutano, 8/10/95, JM

Shelley's Starling: 2 birds in dry *Acacia* scrub by Malindi-Tsavo East road, 20/2, MMu

Sharpe's Starling: Mt Elgon NP, Aug. 1996, MB; group of birds, tree tops, Mt Elgon, 4/2, MMu; 2 birds in forest, Kijabe, 21/6, KD, AB; 10+ seen together, Aberdare NP, 16/5, DR

Fischer's Starling (A# 891): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH — this is one of the most western records for this species

Magpie Starling: observed at Kurungu, South Horr, 14/11/96, KD, MB; groups feeding in fruiting trees, L. Baringo, 7/2, also in flight and settling in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, 19/2, and again more along Malindi-Tsavo East road, 20/2, MMu; large group in *Acacias*, Nguuni Farm, Bamburi, Mombasa, 8/3 and a few remaining on 19/3, MR — the first record for this species at this site despite many years of observation

Western Violet-backed Sunbird: 1 female, Mrs Barnley's garden, Kitale, 3/4, MM — scarce and local, the Kitale area is the best-known site for the species.

Amethyst Sunbird (A# 932): [post pres 88D] Mbirikani (Makutano), Emali-Loitokitok road, 28/5, CJ

Malachite Sunbird: extraordinary migration, easterly along top of Leopard Cliffs, NNP, 23/2, involving 14 birds in ten minutes, BF

House Sparrow (A# 992): [pres 102D] Kilifi, 02/01, NW; this introduced species was first seen in Magadi 5 years ago, then in Kiserian nearer Nbi 3 year ago and has now been recorded in several place around Nbi (Ngara, Githurai, Ngummo, Westlands, Nyayo Stadium), in Thika [pres 76A] and even the Thika-Kinangop road to a village below Kieni [pres 62d] (BF); [pres 88D] Kimana town, 18/1, FN, and Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr. Kimana 28/5, CJ; [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, & [pres 114A] Green Oasis Hotel, Msambweni, 19/6, AA

Somali Sparrow: 3 at Kapedo on 28/12/96, and 9 on 15/6, BF; 20+ Lodwar Town, 2/4, RB

White-headed Buffalo-Weaver (A# 1004): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH; 1 in Masai Mara, 15/8, DR — an unusual species for Mara.

Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver (A# 1003): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver (A# 997): 1 seen Thigiri ridge, Nbi, 24 & 31/5, MM — at c.1,700m altitude, this is a high record for this species which has moved into Nairobi from the south over the past 10 years or so; [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Baglafecht Weaver (A# 960): [pres 74C] Sekenani Camp, Masai Mara, 4/8, CJ

Spectacled Weaver (A# 962): [pres 51B] Samburu & Buffalo Springs NR, 29/8/93, WGH

Juba Weaver: quite scarce along Daua River, Ramu, 23/4, BF, TS, JR — an uncommonly reported species due to its range in Kenya restricted to just the N.E. corner

Vitelline Masked Weaver (A# 954): [pres 49B] at Kormor, Kerio Valley, 29/3, MB

Speke's Weaver (A# 942): [pres 51B] Samburu-Buffalo Springs NR, 2/4/94, & [pres 52C] Meru NP, 7/4/96, WGH — an unusually low record for this normally highland species

Spectacled Weaver (A# 961): [pres 51B] Samburu-Buffalo Springs NR, 2/4/94, WGH

Black-headed Weaver (A# 940): [pres 88C] Amboseli NP, 16/3, WV, TM

Fire-fronted Bishop (A# 977): [pres 101C] bird in male breeding plumage, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Northern Red Bishop: small numbers along Daua River, Ramu, undoubtedly Ethiopian race *pusillus* which, unlike nominate, is found in scrub and perches in trees, April, BF

White-winged Widowbird (A# 979): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH — this probably represents wanderers coming to the area in response to rains; [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird (A# 983): [pres 48C] 2 at Sio River on territories, 18/6, BF

Parasitic Weaver: frequent in NNP with roost of up to 40 birds in swamp below Eland Lookout, mid-'97, BF

Grey-headed Negrofinch (A# 1005): [pres 62D] Kieni Forest, 25/1, WGH, MM, RR — this is not an unexpected record and in fact has probably been observed here before but never reported for the Atlas update

Orange-winged Pytilia: a pair at Kanyarkwat west of Kongelai, 3/4, RB

Red-headed Bluebill (A# 1015): [pres 52C] Campi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 8/1, PH — an uncommon species in the Meru forests

Bar-breasted Firefinch (A# 1017): [pres 60D] a pair mist-netted and ringed, Raganga, Kisii, 19/4, OM — this represents a range extension south and the first record for this species in Kenya south of the Winam Gulf

Red-billed Firefinch (A# 1019): [pres 49B] at Kormor, Kerio Valley, 29/3, MB

Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu (A# 1024): [pres 114A] Green Oasis Hotel, Msambweni, 19/6, AA

Zebra Waxbill (A# 1039): [pres 76C] just north-west of Sultan Hamud, 17/2/95, & [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH

Locust-Finch: at Sio River, 2 on 31/12/96, & 4 on 18/6, BF

Quail-Finch (A# 1040): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

African Silverbill (A# 1044): [pres 15C] Kalacha, Chalbi Desert, 3/3, MB; [pres 76C] Game Ranching Co., Athi River, 3/4, WV & TM; [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

Grey-headed Silverbill (A# 1045): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, & [pres 101C] Taita Hills Lodge, 1/6/94, WGH

Black-and-white Mannikin (A# 1042): [pres 52C] 10+ birds, Kindani River, Meru NP, 30/3, AG — this record represents birds at the eastern limit of the Mt. Kenya highlands population

Cut-throat Finch (A# 1046): [pres 101C] Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 12/6, AA

White-bellied Canary (A# 1057): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Brimstone Canary (A# 1059): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Southern Grosbeak Canary: Endashant Swamp, 13/9, WGH, MM — an uncommon and local resident species, endemic to southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, this marks the northern-most edge of its small range

Stripe-breasted Seedeater: 3 at Timau junction, 13/6, BF

House Bunting: a singing male near Eliye Springs, West Turkana, 1/4, RB

Somali Golden-breasted Bunting (A# 1051): [pres 87A] Shombole, L. Natron, 1/5/94, WGH

Observations: Palaearctic species

White Stork: 20+ in Masai Mara on 24/5 represent a very late date for this species, and a single bird on 15/8 near Governor's Camp, followed by 3 near Sekenani Camp, Masai Mara, an early record, DR; 4 at Iten, 22/6, BF, are very unusual — could they have been birds from the southern Africa population?

Eurasian Wigeon: a drake on Kongoni Lake, Naivasha, 17/1, BF

Common Teal: a male among other ducks, new Nakuru Sewage Ponds, 12/1, CJ; a single female, Lewa Downs, 20/2, BF

Osprey: 1 in NNP, 2/2, BF

Montagu's Harrier: 20+ hunting at dusk and later roosting together on the ground, Lewa Downs, Nanyuki, 4/1, JW

Eurasian Marsh Harrier (A# 97): [pres 76C] just north-west of Sultan Hamud, 17/2/95, & [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH; [pres 88A] female/imm near a watering point along water pipeline, Olosideti, Emali-Loitokitok road, 18/1, CJ, FN

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (A# 106): [post pres 26B] an imm female which flew into a house, was caught, photographed and released, Gatab, Mt Kulal, 16/9/96, MB — an extremely early record for this rare species for which there are less than 20 Kenyan records all between Nov and March. (This record was mentioned in the Overview of Records in *Kenya Birds* 5(2), but inadvertently missed from the main list.)

Common Buzzard (A# 117): [pres 52C] Meru NP, 7/4/96, WGH

Booted Eagle: 2 birds (1 pale phase, 1 a tatty dark phase), Nbi NP, 17/1, CJ, ST

Eurasian Hobby (A# 152): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH; 12 birds feeding on termites, Shaba NR, 4/4, CJ; c. 15 birds soaring near Murungaru centre, N. Kinangop, 6/4, JWG

Sooty Falcon: at least 4 feeding on termites after very heavy rain, Tudor Creek, Mombasa, 2/5, MR; 1 on telephone wires, Kampi ya Samaki turn-off, L. Baringo, 3/5, MV

Corncrake: 1 on ILRI compound, Kabete, Nbi, 20/4, RB

Little Ringed Plover: 20+ at Dandora Sewage Ponds, 8/1, CJ; 'several' near main gate, L. Bogoria NP, 8/2, MMu

Lesser Sand Plover: a single bird among large numbers of waders on new Nakuru Sewage Ponds, 12/1, CJ

Grey Plover: single bird at tip of Crescent Island, Naivasha, 26/1, CJ — this species is only occasional inland and then usually between Sept-Nov.

Little Stint (A# 239): [pres 88D] several birds, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Temminck's Stint: single bird, Dandora Sewage Ponds, 8/1; 1 by lake shore on 11/1 and 2 at new Nakuru Sewage Ponds on 12/1 (one possibly the same as that of 11th); 2 near Crescent Island, L. Naivasha, 26/1, CJ

Ruff (A# 247): [pres 88D] numerous on swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*; a single bird, Sabaki River mouth, 19/3, RDG — one of relatively few coastal records of this mainly inland species

Common Snipe (A# 249): [pres 88D] common in shallow edges of swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Marsh Sandpiper (A# 260): [pres 88D] frequent around edge of swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Common Greenshank (A# 261): [pres 88D] several individuals in the swamp, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*

Wood Sandpiper: a single over-summering bird in NNP, 23/6, BF — most June-July records tend to be in the Rift Valley for this species

Red-necked Phalarope (A# 269): [pres 51C] on a dam in Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 16/10/96, FK — this beautiful wader normally winters many kilometres off-shore in the Indian Ocean; there are only a handful of inland records such as this one and most have tended to be on the Rift Valley lakes

Black-headed Gull: an ad in full breeding plumage, Gongoni Salt Works, nr Malindi, 27/6, BF — since the 1970s, this species has become a more regular and numerous Palaearctic visitor, though this observation constitutes the first over-summering record since the 1980s

Gull-billed Tern (A# 301): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, & [pres 88C] Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH — an unusual record for this species away from the Rift Valley lakes or the coast

Caspian Tern: 2 birds at Gongoni Salt Works, nr. Malindi, 27/6, BF — another unusual over-summering record though known to occur all year off the Tanzanian coast

Sandwich Tern: 1 at Sabaki River Mouth, 10/1, BF

Eurasian Swift (A# 418): [pres 88C] Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH

Eurasian Bee-eater: 15+ birds heading north, N. Kinangop, 8/4, JWG

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (A# 447): [pres 88D] Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ *et al.*; juv. perched on tree-top, Ndara Ranch, Voi, mid-March, MR

Eurasian Roller (A# 454): [pres 26D] Kurungu, South Horr, 16/11/96, KD

Eurasian Wryneck (A# 511): [pres 50A] beside L. Baringo, 22/12/96, WGH

Common House Martin: 300+ Tagabi Tea Estate, Kericho, 20/10/96; 150+ Chemelil, Kisumu, 7/11/96, KDK; 5-10 with Barn Swallows, Delamere's Camp, L. Elmenteita, 11/1, and 1 with other hirundines, Nbi NP, 17/1, CJ

White Wagtail: 10 birds at Mogotio, 27/12/96, BF; 4 birds, Dandora Sewage Ponds, 8/1, and 7+ at new Nakuru Sewage Ponds, 12/1, CJ; single bird at hot springs, L. Elmenteita, 30/1, JWG; 2 birds L. Bogoria NP, 8/2, MMu — a very good year for this relatively uncommon migrant

Grey Wagtail: in the Gorge, Hell's Gate NP, 1/3, JWG

Red-throated Pipit (A# 816): 70+ around new Nakuru Sewage Ponds, 12/1; [pres 88D] a few birds seen, Kimana Game Sanctuary, 19/1, FN, CJ et al; [pres 51C] 2 birds in spring plumage foraging in field after heavy storm, beside main road, 25 km east of Timau, 7/4, CJ

Rufous Bush Chat (A# 658): [pres 63D] Mwea NP, 25/3/95, WGH

Irania (A# 646): [pres 50B] a singe bird at Ol Malu Ranch, Rumuruti, 23/1, C&RF; single bird, NNP, 23/2, BF — an unusual date for this area

Common Redstart: single male, L. Baringo, 28/12/96, BF — one of the rarer Palaearctic migrants

Northern Wheatear: ad male, Voi Lodge, 29/7, T&MG — this is an extremely early record for this species

and may in fact be of an individual that over-summered here.

Great Reed Warbler: L. Bogoria NP, 30/3, TL, GF

Olivaceous Warbler: bird singing daily in *Acacia* tree, car park, NMK, Nbi, 15/2-26/3, CJ

Olive-tree Warbler: Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH

Icterine Warbler (A# 701): 1 at Siana Springs, eastern Mara, 15/1, BF — for 7th successive year in traditional wintering site; [post pres 75B] single bird singing, NMK, Nbi, 8/2, CJ;

Barred Warbler: 2 birds, cliffs west of L. Baringo, 7/2, MMu; Amboseli NP, 30/3, WGH

Common Whitethroat (A# 706): [pres 26D] Kurungu, South Horr, 16/11/96, KD, MB; female, Thigiri Ridge, Nbi, 3/5, MM

Wood Warbler: 1 bird with Willow Warblers feeding in mangroves beside Mida Creek, Watamu, 11/3, RDG, WK — only the second coastal record of this scarce species (and only c.25 Kenyan records), the first in 1979, being also both at Mida Creek and during March

Chiffchaff (A# 714): 1 calling, Met Station, Naro Moru, Mt. Kenya, 23/12/96, BF; [pres 62D] single bird, Kieni Forest, 25/1, WGH, MM, RR — this scarce migrant is probably often overlooked due to it's similarity to the commoner Willow Warbler

Red-backed Shrike: incredible fall of c.2,500 birds in NNP, 5/4, rapidly diminishing over the next few days, BF

Red-tailed Shrike (A# 858): [pres 26D] Kurungu, South Horr, 16/11/96, MB

Lesser Grey Shrike: up to 1,000 birds in NNP on 5/4 associated with the fall of Red-backed Shrikes, BF

Woodchat Shrike: an ad at Sio River, 31/12/96, BF — this jazzy bird is a very uncommon migrant this far south, Kenya being right at the southeastern edge of its wintering range

Eurasian Golden Oriole (A# 573): [post pres 26D], Kurungu, South Horr,18/11/96, KD, MB

Breeding Records

Many thanks go to all those who have sent in Nest Record Cards over the past year or so. There has been a great response to the appeal for breeding records (or there have been an unusually large number of birds breeding this year!) and we are having to order a new set of cards as the stock is basically gone! The new card will be slightly different to the last one, with small adjustments that should make it easier to complete. A total of 289 records have been submitted and accepted by 41 contributors — almost 100 records and 10 people more than for the previous six months. Of these, 257 were confirmed and 32 probable breeding records and in all cover 152 species, again, a tremendous 38 species more than previously. Those people who sent in breeding records are listed below — all those who sent in more than 10 deserve special congratulations, particularly Jeffrey Coburn and James Gathitu who both submitted an impressive number of cards.

Nest record card contributors:

Jeffrey Coburn	69	Bill Harvey	8
James Gathitu	42	Kimtai Korir	8
Shailesh Patel	24	Wayne Vos	8
Fleur Ng'weno	21	Japhet Mwok	7
Dorrie Brass	20	Sybil Sassoon	6
Neil Willshire	20	Patrick Gichuki	6
Francis N. Kiiru	18	Mercy Njeri Muiruri	5
Abdulaziz Abdalla	17	Bernard Mburu	5
Samuel N. Kimani	17	Geoffrey Irvine	4
David Mutinda	15	Paul Kabochi	4
Wednesday Birdwalk	14	Fidel Kyalo	4
Carol Kruger	12	Andrew Odhiambo	4
Onesmas Kahindi	11	Ann Gathitu	4
Peter Chirchir	11	Tirus Njuguna	3
Kuria Ndung'u	11	Charles Rugara	3
Titus Imboma	10	Lorna Depew	3
Peter Mwangi	9		

Two cards were submitted by: Lech Iliszko, Martin Kahindi, Peter Karanja, Kevin Mulai, Joseph Mwaura, Reuben Nagaya, Peter Njoroge, Paul Wainaina, and Paul Mwaura,

Single cards were submitted by: Melissa Barnett, Andy Bowen, Trels McGregor, Muchai Muchane, Wesley Near, David Ngala, Andrew Itote, Fraciah Kamau, Peter le Pelley, Stefan Rozwadowski, Rudnai, Peter Tsuma, Edward vanden Berghe, Narinda Heyer, Samson Wahuhia and Peter Mwangi,

Blank Nest Record Cards (NRCs) are available upon request (see above).

N.B. A small note to make concerning completing NRCs — if juveniles are observed being fed by an adults, please note down the number of juvenile birds involved under "young seen, Out nest"

Breeding records of interest

Common Ostrich (A# 1): [post conf 88A] 2+ chicks with ads, along Emali-Loitokitok road, 19/1, FN

Somali Ostrich (A# 1): [post conf 51D] 9 chicks accompanying 2 ads, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 20/10/96, FK

Black-necked Grebe: 1 juv seen accompanying ads, Endashant Swamp, 14/6, WGH — a species for which relatively few breeding records have been made in recent years.

Cattle Egret (A# 30): [conf 88A] colony of c.350 nests with birds observed courting, nest-building and incubating, Emali town centre, 1/6, PN, LAB, PGG, MMs

Little Egret (A# 35): [conf 75B] 6 nests, 1 with downy young, Endashant Swamp, 14/6, WGH

Hamerkop (A# 44): [prob 101C] freshly built nest over river, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 10/6, AA

Saddle-billed Stork: ad carrying nest material, NNP, 21/5, WMB — a species for which there are relatively few breeding records

African Spoonbill: 8 nests with incubating ads, Endashant Swamp, 14/6, WGH

Egyptian Goose (A# 64): [conf 88B] 2 chicks accompanied by ad, Umani Springs Camp, Kibwezi, 12/6/96, KN

Red-billed Teal (A# 76): [conf 51C] 9 ducklings with ads, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 6/9/96, FK

Southern Pochard: nest with 4 eggs on islet, Endashant Swamp, 14/6, WGH — this represents the most northerly breeding for this species which is mostly a non-breeding visitor from southern Africa.

African Cuckoo Hawk (A# 136): [conf 63A] feeding young, Mountain Lodge, 3/3, BF

Mountain Buzzard (A# 116): [conf 101A] young (heard but not seen) being fed in nest, Mbololo Forest, Taita Hills, 20-23/3, TI

Palm-nut Vulture: on nest, Samburu River, 5/3, BF

Tawny Eagle (A# 129): [conf 101C] 3 young being fed by ad in nest on top of

Acacia tortilis tree, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 18/6, AA

Verreaux's Eagle: adult sitting on nest in a *Euphorbia*, NNP, 20/4, AG, SG

African Crowned Eagle (A# 122): single chick successfully fledged from nest in property adjacent to Giraffe Centre, Lang'ata, Nbi, Nov '96-Mar '97, PK — this is presumably the pair that used to breed in Ololua Forest, Karen, but which deserted due to disturbance; [conf 101A] young (heard but not seen) being fed in nest by ad, Ngangao Forest, Taita Hills, 20-23/2, TI

Martial Eagle (A# 123): [conf 62A] single chick in nest and later seen fledged, Soysambu Game Sanctuary, L. Elmenteita, 23/4-2/6, PKa

Stone Partridge (A# 176): [conf 51C] 2 young with ads, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 20/10/96, FK

Crested Francolin (A# 167): [conf 76C] 2-4 chicks with ads, Game Ranching Co., Athi River, 3/4, WV & TM

Common Moorhen (A# 201): [conf 76A] ad with 3 chicks, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 15/6, PLO

Lesser Moorhen (A# 200): [conf 76A] ad with one chick, Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 15/6, PLO

African Finfoot: female with 2 young, Hippo Pools, Nbi NP, 1-8/6, MM, WGH (reported by KWS ranger at Pools).

Kori Bustard: young fledgling with ad, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 12/4, TM — there are relatively few breeding records submitted for this bird, despite it being such an obvious species (Kenya's largest flying bird).

Hartlaub's Bustard: nest with 2 eggs, Game Ranching Co., Athi River, 7-16/5, ST — this is apparently the first nest for this species to have been described.

Black-winged Plover (A# 223): [conf 49A] 2 downy chicks observed, Sergoit, Eldoret, 26/5, CK

Whiskered Tern (A# 312): [conf 62D] 2 recently fledged juvs at Githumbwini Dam, Thika, 28/6, OD

Lemon Dove (A# 334): [conf 101A] a recently fledged juv caught and ringed and another seen, Mbololo Forest, Taita Hills, 18/3, TI

Ring-necked Dove (A# 328): [conf 88D] 2 nests with 2 eggs each, Mbirikani centre, nr. Kimana, 28/5, CJ

Hartlaub's Turaco (A# 358): [conf 101A] single juv being fed by ad, Ngangao Forest, Taita Hills, 20/2, TI

Diederik Cuckoo (A# 374): [conf 74C] juv being fed by male Black-headed Weaver, Sekenani Gate, Masai Mara Game Reserve, 26/5, OK

Montane Nightjar (398): [conf 62C] 2 young successfully fledged, Murungaru, N. Kinangop, early July, FNj

Lilac-breasted Roller: pair breeding of the race *lorti*, Ramu, 23/4, BF, TS, JR

Broad-billed Roller (A# 457): [conf 101A] juv begging for food from ad — following ad with much wing-shivering, Ngangao Forest, Taita Hills, 23/3, TI

Nubian Woodpecker (A# 512): [conf 76C] at least one young in nest-hole in *Acacia xanthophloea*, Game Ranching Ltd, Athi River, 15/2, WV

Brown-backed Woodpecker (A# 523): [prob 63A] ad excavating nest-hole, above Meteorological Station, Naro Moru route, Mt Kenya NP, 21/5, DR

Rufous-naped Lark (A# 531): [conf 62C] nest with 2 young, Kirima, western edge of N. Kinangop, 14/3, SNK

Pink-breasted Lark (A# 533): [prob 88D] ad carrying nest material, Mbirikani, nr. Kimana, 29/5, CJ

Red-capped Lark (A# 540): [post conf 62C] nest with 2 young and 1 infertile egg, Kirima, western edge of N. Kinangop, 25/5-7/6, SNK

Fischer's Sparrow-Lark (A# 545): [conf 88D] 2 nests with 2 eggs each, Mbirikani (Makutano), 28/5, CJ

Rock Martin (A# 560): [conf 74C] 2 young being fed in nest, Sekenani Gate, Masai Mara, 10-13/6, OK

Malindi Pipit: nest with 2 young, c.1 week old, and ad feeding fledged juv, north bank of Sabaki River mouth; another ad feeding fledged juv, L. Chemchem, Malindi, 6/1, DN, JS

White-browed Robin-Chat (A# 606): [conf 74B] juv being fed by ad, Narok Boys High School, Narok, 25/5, OK

Taita Thrush (A# 678 *note — was considered conspecific with Olive Thrush*): [post conf 101A] single juv caught and ringed, Mugambonyi 14/3, and 2 being fed by ads, Mbololo Forest, Taita Hills, 4/4, TI

African Grey Flycatcher (A# 793): [conf 51C] ad feeding young, Lewa Downs, Isiolo,1/2, KM

Wing-snapping Cisticola (A# 717): [conf 76C] nest with 2 young and 1 infertile egg, Kirima, western edge of N. Kinangop, 14/5-6/6, SNK

Bar-throated Apalis (A# 753): [conf 101A] juvs heard in nest and being fed by ad, Ngangao Forest, Taita Hills, 17-19/2, TI — this is the first confirmed breeding record for this species in Kenya, this race of which is endemic to the Taita Hills (and considered by some to be a full species in its own right)

Northern Crombec (A# 712): [prob 51B] ad actively building nest, Shaba NR, Isiolo, 4/4, CJ

Red-faced Crombec (A# 771): [conf 88D] nest with ad incubating eggs, Oloorsikitok hill, Mbirikani, 28/5, CJ

Black-and-white Flycatcher (A# 794): [conf 52C] male and female photographed on nest, near Kampi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 8/1, PH — this is the first breeding record for this rare species for over 30 years

Black-throated Wattle-eye: ad male feeding juv, Windsor Golf & Country Club, Nbi, 15/5, KN — a relatively local & uncommon species for which few breeding records are submitted

House Sparrow (A# 992): [conf 75B] ad carrying food into nest from which young heard, Shan Cinema, Ngara, Nbi, 6/2, PGG; ad feeding 2 juvs out of nest, Githurai Cable, Ruiru, 1-5/5, OK; single juv being fed by ad, South B, Nbi, 7/6, SP — this introduced species has now been recorded in several place around Nairobi, though these are the first submitted breeding records

Grey-headed Sparrow (A# 990): [post conf 88D] ads carrying food into nest hole and sound of young birds in nest, roof of 'Barcelona Bar', Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr. Kimana, 26/5, CJ

White-headed Buffalo-Weaver (A# 1004): [prob 88D] ad carrying nesting material, Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr. Kimana, 30/5, PGG

Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver (A# 1003): [prob 101C] several nests together "in use", Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 26/5, AA

Grosbeak Weaver (A# 970): [prob 101A] nest "in use", Ziwani Tented Camp, Tsavo West NP, 28/5, AA

Jackson's Golden-backed Weaver (A# 950): [conf 49D] colony of c. 20 nests

in a variety of breeding stages — ads incubating, feeding young, between Emening and Radad, Baringo road, 18/9/96, LI, MRz

Vitelline Masked Weaver (A# 954): [prob 101C] nest "in use" on *Balanites* tree, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 20/5, AA

Lesser Masked Weaver (A# 953): [prob 101C] nest "in use", Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 20/5, AA

Speke's Weaver (A# 942): [prob 88D] male nest-building and displaying to 2-3 females, lone *Acacia xanthophloea* tree, Ol Enkijape primary school, Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr. Kimana, 26/5, CJ — an unusual record being at relatively low-altitude and in a hot and dry area

Black-headed Weaver (A# 940): [conf 74C] ad male feeding juv Diederik Cuckoo, Sekenani Gate, Masai Mara NR, 26/5, OK

Chestnut Weaver (A# 956): [prob 101C] cluster of nests "in use", Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 20/5, AA

Red-headed Weaver (A# 969): [prob 61A] nest-building activities, Jan-May & Sept '96, Homa Lime, Koru, nr. Kisumu, NW

Cardinal Quelea (A# 988): [prob 101C] male in breeding plumage displaying and singing, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 20/5, AA

Pin-tailed Whydah (A# 1032): [prob 101C]] male singing whilst circling and hovering over a female, Salt Lick Game Sanctuary, Tsavo West, 20/5, AA

Yellow-crowned Canary (A# 1053): [post conf 62C] nest with 3 young, Kirima, western edge of N. Kinangop, 27/6, SNK

Somali Golden-breasted Bunting (A# 1051): [conf 88D] nest with 3 eggs, Oloorsikitok hill, Mbirikani (Makutano) centre, nr. Kimana, 28/5, CJ

Abbreviations

imm – immature; L. – Lake; NMK – National Museums of Kenya; Nbi – Nairobi; NP – National Park; NNP – Nairobi National Park; NR – National Reserve; Ngulia SL – Ngulia Safari Lodge

Contributors

AA, Abdulaziz Abdalla
MB, Melissa Barnett
KB, Kimbo Beakbane
LAB, Leon Bennun
WMB, EANHS Weds. morning birdwalk
RB, Richard Bishop
AB, Andy Bowen
TC, Tortilis Camp
ND, Neil Davidson
KD, Kristin Davis
OD, Ornithology Department staff
BF, Brian Finch
DF, David Fisher
CF, Chris Flatt
C&RF, Colin & Rocky Francombe
IF, Ian Francombe
GF, Gunhild Frandsen
JWG, James Wainaina
PGG, Patrick Gichuki
SG, Sue Giddings
AG, Ann Goss
T&MG, T & M Graham
RDG, Richard Gregory
NbiRG, Nairobi Ringing Group
WGH, Bill Harvey
PH, Peter Headland
HH, Harold Henry
LI, Lech Iliszko
TI, Titus Imboma
G&DI, Geoffrey & Dorothy Irvine
CJ, Colin Jackson

JJ, Jeffrey James
ChJ, Chris Jameson
PKa, Paul Kabochi
OK, Onesemas Kahindi
PK, Peter Karanja
DK, Dan Kennedy
SNK, Samuel N. Kimani
KDK, Korir Kimtai
WK, Willington Kombe
CK, Carol Kruger
FK, Kidel Kyalo
TL, Thomas Lehmberg
JAL, Jeremy Lindsell
MM, Mark Mallalieu
MMs, Maurus Msuha
MMu, M. Muller
TM, Trels McGregor
KM, Kevin Mulai
OM, Ogeto Mwebi
JM, Japheth Mwok
KN, Kuria Ndung'u
DN, David Ngala
GTN, George Ngigi
FN, Fleur Ng'weno
PN, Peter Njoroge
FNj, Francis Njuguna
EO, Eric Omondi
PLO, EANHS 'Pot Luck' Outing
SP, Shailesh Patel
MP, Mike Potter
MR, Marlene Reid
MRz, Magdalena Remisiewicz
JR, Jamie Roberts
AS, Alfred Simiyu
DR, Dave Richards
RRo, Richard Roberts
RR, Roger Rose
SS, Sybil Sassoon
JS, Joe Schwarz
TS, Terry Stevenson
ST, Simon Thomsett
DAT, Don Turner
MV, Munir Virani
WV, Wayne Vos
NW, Neil Willshire
JW, Janet Wood
J&JW, Jeff & Jessica Worden.

Erratum

In *Kenya Birds* vol. 5(2) a loose A4 sheet was included showing the Quarter Square Degree numbers for the Bird Atlas of Kenya. On the map, Embu town is shown as being located in QSD 63D; it should be shown in 63C.

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Notes

Birds of prey at Tudor Creek, Mombasa

I moved to a house on Tudor Creek some three years ago. Coming from a flat in the Old Town with a beautiful view over the harbour entrance and English Point, I was a bit nervous as to how I would like my new 'view'. 'Lakini', notwithstanding my equally lovely outlook, it has turned out to be a marvellously productive bird area. I am particularly impressed with the birds of prey, some resident but many migratory. An Ayres's Eagle has been riding the thermals of the creek every afternoon around 3 pm for all the three seasons I have been here. He arrives about October and leaves mid-March. I am sure it is the same bird, the exact same morph and markings, usually content to ride thermals but occasionally descending with wings folded back to his tail, chasing some tasty little birds. He always descends into the same clump of mangroves when he gets tired of riding high — probably his roosting place. This year we had two Peregrine Falcons. Their main object seemed to be to catch termites and they objected strongly to the two African Fish Eagles which fly over from the north side. One Sunday I watched the fish eagles playing, touching talons, calling their haunting tune, being bombarded by the Peregrines while a small flock of Woolly-necked Storks coasted overhead — a veritable circus. The garden next but one to me is full of indigenous trees and over Christmas a pair of Great Sparrowhawks nested. I saw both male and female and heard lots of crying which was obviously the young but never, despite much craning, walking under the trees and getting bitten to death by mosquitoes, did I ever see either the nest site or the young, so thick is the canopy (and so may it long remain). It was very gratifying to see the Indian House Crow skeletons lying under the sparrowhawks' perching place. The family seems to have separated now, only the male crosses from the large mango tree to his roosting place each evening. A pair of Lizard Buzzards are now flashing in and out of the same area. I have seen Little Sparrowhawk and African Goshawk in the same trees, but fleetingly. 2 May 1997 brought some rather special visitors. It had been raining for 72 hours non-stop, I had arrived from Nairobi the previous day to find Mombasa flooded, the skies leaden. Imagine my joy when I went to the verandah early in the morning to find a small flock of Sooty Falcons feeding on the termites. So incredible was their flight — swooping and catching the insects, consuming them almost non-stop — that I almost felt sorry for the poor old crows trying to emulate them, having to stop for a breather in the palm tree after every dudu. As it was so dark, these crepuscular feeders stayed active nearly all day, coming so close to my verandah that I could see their yellow eye ring. During the morning

a flock of Roseate Terns joined in the feast together with the last of this year's Barn Swallows. It is fairly quiet at the moment but who knows what tomorrow will bring? — *Marlene Reid, P O Box P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

Birding along Nairobi streets

I would like to share some of the delights of bird-spotting near my office situated in the City Centre, whose streets are better known for thieves than birds. The office is on the fourth floor of Embassy House, along Harambee Avenue. The locality is endowed with palms, fruit-bearing and *Acacia* trees, and has land-mark buildings, including Harambee House, the Kenya Police Headquarters, Kenyatta International Conference Centre, the Parliament, Sheria House and the Holy Family Basilica.

Pied Crows and Superb Starlings patronise the roofs of most buildings. They stand in a line sun-basking in the mornings and evenings. Crows and starlings jointly mob Black Kites; the alliance has proved effective in expelling a pair each of Peregrine Falcons and Harrier Hawks from the area.

Little Swifts swirl noisily in hundreds from dawn to dusk. The African Rock Martin makes seasonal appearances. The yellow-barked acacia trees in the gardens of KICC attract the chatty White-browed Sparrow Weavers; Brown Parisomas roam the flat-topped canopy, and Yellow-breasted Apalis visits occasionally. White-bellied Tits forage in the mid-stratum. Superb and Greater Blue-eared Starlings feed on the lawns below, where Bronze Mannikin and Red-billed Firefinch can be found too. Early in the morning, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill and Hadada Ibis can be found in the tipuana tippu trees between Harambee and Sheria Houses.

Many birds fly overhead too. Flocks of Great White Pelicans and Marabou Storks can be seen high in the southern sky riding on the thermal currents; Yellow-billed Stork, Crowned Plover, Sacred Ibis, Crowned Crane, Black-headed and Grey Heron fly past hastily in the morning, probably to suitable haunts in the northern outskirts, before the 'mad' city wakes up. Sometimes the plovers make short stops in the grassy compound of KICC. At least once a week, Giant Kingfisher darts, quacking loudly, across the sky. The bird calls frequently from the recreational man-made dam at Uhuru Park. I think more birds travel at night because twice I have found dead male Harlequin Quail outside Nairobi Cinema.

The President's bodyguards are always excited by the fishing techniques of Pied Kingfisher in the pond at the entrance of the president's office at Harambee House. In 1995, a pair of Hamerkop began nesting on a tree near the same pond. Their effort was thwarted by gardeners who became concerned by the increasing

White-headed Mousebird —*Edwin Selempo*

mass of twigs and branches that made the vicinity of the most honourable office in Kenya look 'untidy'. Nevertheless, the pair still hunts there today peacefully.

While walking along City Hall Way, it's hard to miss the plaintive calls of Klaas's and Diederik Cuckoos and the Red-eyed Dove in the thick foliage of trees around Garden Square restaurant. Feral Pigeons and Red-winged Starlings dominate the Holy Family Basilica in the neighbourhood. Pied Wagtails like running along the concrete wall of the restaurant.

Outside Embassy House, Paradise Flycatchers catch insects near the main doorway. Grey-headed and House Sparrows are common in the lane. Laughing Doves enjoy walking on the pavements alongside pedestrians. The nearby garbage dump attracts Superb Starling, Rufous Sparrow, Olive Thrush and Common Bulbul. A pair of Fiscal Shrikes seems to like perching in the middle of the round-about between Parliament and Harambee Avenue.

The jacaranda tree in the Embassy House car park is also a favourite perch for Streaky Seadeaters and Common Bulbuls. In March 1997, the most unexpected visitor, a Black-headed Oriole, perched on the tree as well.

When trees and plants in the gardens are in flower, Variable and Bronze Sunbirds move in: only once did I see Scarlet-chested Sunbird.

Bird-spotting in this part of the City is really delightful! — *Onesmas Kahindi, P O Box 34730, Nairobi*

Lekking bustards?

On 7 December 1997, about 10 km south of Kajiado town on the Namanga road, I saw eight adult Kori Bustards on the west side of the road, and on the east side a single adult. All were close together on open grass in the *Acacia* woodland in the area; but there may have been others that I missed, as I was in a matatu which was moving hastily! There was no obvious reason for this aggregation (such as an outbreak of armyworm or grasshoppers as a food supply), but the area was so green that the rains may have stimulated them to come together for mating purposes — as a 'lek'. I have seen this group behaviour before, years ago, on the Kapiti plains, and *Birds of Africa* (vol. 2) cites the late Leslie Brown as mentioning the birds gathering in particular areas to display. — *Charles Dewhurst, Ella Nore House, West Wittering, Chichester, West Sussex, PO20 8AN, UK.*

Common Button-quail breeding in Nairobi National Park

Although Common Button-quail *Turnix sylvatica* is locally common in dry and moist grassland and other suitable habitat in Kenya, according to the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Nairobi including Nairobi National Park* (W. Harvey (ed.), 1997) the only record for Nairobi National Park is of a single bird in December 1979.

I visited Nairobi National Park with my family on the morning of 16 November 1997. At 08:30 h, whilst driving through the White Grass Ridge area, I stopped the car to identify a small bird by the roadside. I was able to observe it through Zeiss 7 x 42 binoculars at 2 m range and to identify it as an adult Common Button-quail. The bird flew briefly for 1-2 m but remained in view in grass by the roadside, gradually moving back towards the road. It was clearly reluctant to leave the area. I then noticed three tiny chicks approaching the adult. I photographed the adult with two of the chicks, and the adult alone, with a 300 mm lens, all at very close range. Copies of two of the photographs have been sent to the Bird Committee of the East Africa Natural History Society. The birds were in view for about three minutes before they disappeared into the grass. — *Mark Mallalieu, P O Box 30465, Nairobi.*

Two Nairobi cuckoo records

Klaas's Cuckoo, 26 May 1997, Ololua Ridge
On my usual afternoon day walk at the end of Ololua Ridge, Karen, my attention was drawn by a bird call I did not recognize I eventually located a juvenile Klaas's Cuckoo in the lower branches of an arrow-poison tree (*Acokanthera schimperi*) being fed by an adult male of the same species. The adult male called with a quiet 'whispy' note each time it brought a caterpillar (four times in the 5 minutes it was observed). The juvenile flew to a different branch each time. The male then gave the usual Klaas's Cuckoo call and flew off to bring another caterpillar.

Black Cuckoo, 30 June 97, Ololua Ridge
A juvenile Black Cuckoo was seen and heard calling from the top branches of a tall *Cassia* tree at the edge of the garden next to Ololua Forest. An answering call was heard in the distance. An adult was seen and heard in the same tree at the beginning of the rains in April this year and heard calling many times from surrounding trees and forest since, mostly on wet days. According to *The Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* the breeding habits of this bird are not clear. In the six years living in this house I have seen (rarely) and heard (often) this bird, near the house, nearly always in wet periods. — *Janet Wood, P O Box 24615, Nairobi.*

[*Editors' note*: The Klaas's Cuckoo sighting shows just how little we know about this fascinating group of brood-parasitic birds. Adult cuckoos are 'supposed' not to look after their young, but leave them entirely in the care of the foster parents. Do any other readers have records of cuckoos feeding juveniles?]

Little Egret feeding on Omena in Lake Victoria

Little Egrets normally feed in shallow water, either by standing still and waiting for prey to appear or by walking through the water snapping at prey.

Around the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya, I have often observed Little Egrets flying low or hovering over the water with legs dangling. When food is sighted they stretch down and pick it up with their bill.

The food always appears to be small dead fish *Engraulicypris argenteus* — locally called Omena — which are found floating on the surface of the lake each morning. At night the Lake Victoria fishermen lure the Omena into their nets by suspending kerosene lamps above the lake's surface from their boats. Working at

night in very difficult conditions, the fishermen lose many of the tiny fish over the side of the fishing canoes.

This foraging behaviour of the egrets has been reported from Luanda Harbour, Angola (see *Birds of Africa*, vol. 1), where there are no other birds competing for the fish. By contrast in Lake Victoria the Little Egrets face stiff competition from Black Kites and occasionally Hamerkops, which also feed by snatching the dead Omena from the water's surface. — *Dave Richards, P O Box 24545, Nairobi.*

A week from the note-book of a Rift Valley birder...

LOLDIA FARM, north-west of Lake Naivasha

20 May 1997

White-browed Coucal — killed and carried off a Speckled Mousebird. This is a behaviour I have never seen before.

Grey Hornbill — males observed carrying food to two separate nest holes.

Red-billed Oxpecker — frequenting an old woodpecker's nest, carrying food.

We are losing our Malachite Kingfishers — at least five birds have been killed flying into one of our cottage windows, confusing the panes to be a way through.

Blue-naped Mousebirds are still around in plenty, as are a few Gull-billed Terns.

House Sparrow — This bird has colonised most of Naivasha town using the ventilation holes in buildings; also Gilgil and some centres in Naivasha North Lake.

My mysterious puff-backs are back with their loud commotion — presumably Black-backed Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla* and Northern Puffback *D. gambensis*. Both been recorded nesting here.

21 May

Cuckoos — Black, Red-chested, Diederik, Klaas's — are all busy calling, here and in Lake Nakuru Park as well.

Francolins are also much in evidence at the moment, the Coqui in more open areas and Hildebrandt's in wooded places, along with a species as yet unidentified which is more often heard than seen in bush and rocky outcrops. Last month, all three species were also heard and seen in North Kinangop far from the edge of the forest — hearing the Coqui was especially interesting and unexpected over there.

25 May

African Green Pigeon — juvenile bird seen in nest and being fed by an adult.

— James Wainaina, P O Box 695, Naivasha

Seven Grey Parrots in Kakamega

From vol. 5(1) of *Kenya Birds* we gather that the Grey Parrot has not been reported very often from Kakamega Forest for some years.

On the morning of 9 July 1997 at about 06:30, we were alerted by parrot-like calling while watching birds just 300 m down the Ikuywa road beyond the Rondo Retreat Centre. A moment later, we glimpsed a small group not exceeding five in number of unmistakeable big parrot-like birds apparently circling, followed by another pair. They did not reappear while I was watching. However, the following morning at the same time I was privileged to hear the same calling and to see, fully illuminated by the rising sun, a pair of Grey Parrots feeding on the flowering shoots of a tall *Acrocarpus*-like tree to which I had been drawn by seeing it being fed on by literally dozens, if not hundreds, of small sunbirds the day before.

We hope you are receiving many more reports of this bird and that ours is not just an isolated report. — *Geoffrey and Dorothy Irvine, P O Box 1356, Naivasha*

[*Editors' note:* There have indeed been subsequent reports of Grey Parrots from Kakamega, up to a maximum of seven birds. Perhaps the parrots are back, at least for the time being?]

Road of doom

Driving between Narok town and Mai-Mahiu trading centre can be a horrifying episode for a birder, or any naturalist for that matter. Early in the morning of 19 July 1997, I counted 33 dead Dusky Nightjars crashed by cars the previous night. I don't know if it's the bright moon that attracted the birds to the road, leading to the holocaust. I am told that nightjars land on tarmac roads at night after it rains, but no rain had fallen in the area recently.

It is likely that the birds died due to driver carelessness if other victims found along the road can serve as indicators. Just past Narok town on the same night, I found a half-grown male Leopard, crushed. Further ahead, I encountered an African Hare, Dik-dik and Ratel that had met the same fate. Previously I have found vultures, hornbills, larks, Spotted Hyaena, Aardwolf, Thomson's Gazelle, Grant's Gazelle, Common Zebra and Topi killed by vehicles. There is heavy

traffic along this road of lorries and medium-size transport vehicles which operate mostly at night.

The road traverses a wildlife-rich area. It was repaired recently but, surprisingly, there is no traffic road sign warning drivers about the high number of animals moving. This road is a serious animal hazard.

I wonder how many nightjars perish nightly, and what are the implications? — *Onesmas Kahindi, P O Box 34730, Nairobi*

Ross's Turaco in Murang'a?

A friend visited Murang'a town on business early in June 1997 and described the following incident.

Standing outside the DO's office, beneath an ancient, huge fig tree, his attention was drawn by an irritating cacophony: a loud 'hraak, hraak' or 'rrrah, rrrah' noise. Looking up to locate the source of the racket, he saw what he described as a *largeish bird, all dark blue- or purplish-black in colour, with a bright yellow beak, yellow 'face', reddish crest or crown and dark feet.* Looking more closely, he saw three other, similar birds perched on other branches of the tree and calling back and forth to each other.

My friend was curious to know if the bird was anything special, as they had never seen anything like it before. Evidently the bird was a turaco, and at first I assumed it must be Hartlaub's (people have been known to confuse this species for Ross's). However, this observer (a total non-birder!) was adamant that the bird was bluish- or purplish-black in colour and not greenish, and was very sure of the yellow beak and 'face' as well as the red crest or crown. Undoubtedly, what was being described was Ross's Turaco!

Ross's Turaco, though said to wander to open areas with scattered trees, has never been reported so far east before. Has anyone else seen these birds in central Kenya? — *Jean Githaiga, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Caring for sick and injured raptors

Handling and holding of raptors is strictly controlled by the Wildlife (Management and Conservation) Act. Only competent organizations and individuals are permitted to handle and hold raptors. Such organizations include, for example, the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), Kenya Wildlife Service and specific University departments. Increasingly, concerned members of the public are finding raptors that require immediate rescue. Rushed action, however well intentioned, may in fact endanger the bird. Any rescue attempt should therefore be warranted by the

health status of the bird. If the bird stands a chance of survival without intervention, it is usually better off left in the wild.

Unless injured or sick, raptors (with the exception of young nestlings) will not allow close human approach without attempting to escape. The ability to escape is a good indicator of a bird's health status. However, ability to flee does not invariably mean that the bird does not need help. It can, though, help one to choose between rescue, further observation, or non-intervention. Other indications that a bird is sick or injured include apparent wounds and tissue inflammations, fluffed feathers, slow inhalation and fast exhalation, partially or wholly closed eyes, drooping wing(s), asymmetrical posture while perched, and perching in atypical places for a species (e.g. a Peregrine Falcon perching on the ground for long periods). The bird may also appear quiet and even unresponsive.

If rescue is deemed necessary, wrap the casualty in a towel/jumper with minimum fuss. Covering the bird's head (without suffocating it!) will quieten it. Bear in mind that the bird is more frightened than you are and likely to strike. Watch out for the talons; they can be highly dangerous. As soon as possible put the bird in a ventilated box large enough to allow it to stand comfortably. It should be placed somewhere warm (approximately 21°C), in semi-darkness, and undisturbed. DESIST FROM DISPLAYING THE BIRD TO FRIENDS OR FAMILY MEMBERS! Unnecessary stress may kill a critically sick or injured bird.

Bleeding requires quick attention. It can be stemmed by gentle compression with a finger for 5-10 minutes, or by adhesive tape. As a short-term measure, fractured wings should be wrapped snugly against the body in the natural folded position. If they are left hanging, further tissue damage may occur. Before taping the wing to the body, bandage the wing with adhesive tape — the tape should take the shape of a figure 8 around the wing. You then wrap the tape around the bird's body, going under the uninjured wing and avoiding the legs and cloaca.

Concussions occur often in raptors through collisions. Keeping the bird quiet and warm may work fairly well, especially if expert help is unavailable. Occasionally, a bird is very thin and weak due to malnutrition. Some food for a week or so in a secure and warm environment will usually heal the bird.

Overzealous rescuers sometimes pick up young birds which are better off left with their parents. First flights by fledglings are usually clumsy. They often crash-land with little damage done. Unless one is sure that the young bird is injured, it should be left in the wild. Watch out for pre-adult plumage coloration as well. Observed aggression between a young bird and a territorial pair may simply be the natural process of terminating dependence and therefore needs no 'rescue'.

In all cases and circumstances, it is important that you consult professional help as soon as possible. The bird should be held for as short a duration as is

possible and practical. The Department of Ornithology (NMK) will advise you on what action to take if you have a rescued raptor. Veterinary officers may also be able to assist with general injuries such as fractures and bleeding wounds. — *Benard Mburu Chege, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Temminck's Coursers overshadow Malindi Pipits

On Saturday 28 February 1998, the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides, the North Coast KWS Partnership Officer and the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Information and Education Officer headed out to Sabaki River mouth on a birding trip.

It was a bright hot day even in the early hours of the morning, and with the tide on the way out we decided to bird in the scrub and dune area before hitting the river mouth itself. We had hardly reached the open area when a number of pipits started fluttering and running in the short grass ahead of us. David Ngala, a veteran of this area, was confident in affirming that what we saw was a Malindi Pipit, but those less experienced among us were forced to do some painstaking systematic observation. Leg colour seemed to change with the light and the pipits insisted on showing their backs rather than breasts where we hoped to see the distinctive streaking extending down the flanks. They all had yellow at the base of the mandible, and this seemed more obvious when they opened their mouths.

Thus in this fashion we continued checking out each pipit until we saw both the Grassland and Malindi and could recognise some of the differences clearly. Our Grassland Pipits were much lighter brown in colour, and the streaking was on the chest only. David also instructed us to note that the Grassland only had a yellowish base to the mandible whereas the Malindi Pipits he was seeing had very distinct bright yellow bills. It was as we were observing what we had identified as a Malindi Pipit standing tall on a little hillock with some food in its mouth that a sudden cry went up as someone spotted something quite different . We swung round in time to see some rufous heads fringed with a distinctive white 'V' moving through the grass. They moved fairly rapidly, blending with the background of dry grasses and low scrub, such that they were difficult to pick out again immediately. We all turned to David and were surprised to see him looking slightly puzzled but extremely excited as this was something he was not familiar with. As the group of birds moved through the grass between the bushes, pecking at the ground with such force they sent up small showers of sand, they afforded us clear views of their underbellies with a distinct black patch contrasting with the white behind. Strutting through the grass, cocking their heads to one side, they displayed a pale rufous head, a white 'V' lined with black extending from their eyes, a chestnut-brown back and pale throat,

becoming rufous/grey on the chest. Their legs appeared fairly pale and as they flew in low flaps and glides, the complete dark underwing contrasted with the two-tone black and brown upper wing.

We must have studied them from a distance of between 15 and 20 m for about 15 minutes. Then as we progressed on towards the swampy reed pools they ran along in front of us without taking to the wing until they reached the pools themselves. Their flight was short and low with only a few flaps and extended glides.

Having concluded that we had seen five Temminck's Coursers we were interested to learn from Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson, *Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania*, that they have not been sighted in this vicinity before. The reference to them coming as far as the Tana River Delta following periods of heavy rain, however, did make sense as the rainfall from May 1997 to January 1998 has been exceptional all over the country.

For all of the ASF Guides, the Temmick's Courser had given them a new LIFE bird which pleased David Ngala especially, as he had rather thought his home patch had few surprises to offer.

Guides in the group included Ferdinand Maitha, Rashid Malibe, Mwachira, Albert Mwamure, David Ngala, Mathias Ngonyo, Asha Noor and Jimmy Shomie, with Tansy Bliss and Jirmo Tuqa. — *Tansy Bliss with Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides, P O Box 383, Watamu*

A surprise visitor: Bar-tailed Trogon in the Arboretum

Birdwatchers in the Nairobi area have been taking part in Wednesday Morning Birdwalks for more than 25 years! Gathering at the National Museum, Nairobi, every Wednesday before 9:00, they choose a site and spend the morning there, enjoying the birds, the plants and the wildlife.

On 2 July 1997, there were not enough cars to transport all the birdwatchers, so the groups met inside the main entrance, and turned to the right, through a path winding down among the trees.

A sharp-eyed participant spotted a large, red and green bird. A trogon! Seeing a trogon is the high point of walk through a forest. It is a beautiful bird, about the size of a dove, with a long tail. The back is bright iridescent green, and the male's front is brilliant red. Despite its large size and striking colours, it is often difficult to spot among the green leaves of the forest.

The Narina Trogon is resident of the Nairobi forests, but it had been several years since one had been recorded in the Aboretum. So it was an exciting moment. The group spent about five minutes making sure that everyone saw the special bird as if flitted among the branches.

The trogon then sat on a branch nearby, facing us, and began to preen, cleaning and mounting its feathers. We could see every detail. And so we noticed that its tail, from below, was barred with fine black bars on a white background. It wasn't a Narina Trogon, whose tail is smooth white below — it was a Bar-tailed Trogon!

We were amazed. The Bar-tailed Trogon is a bird of the highland forest. In Kenya, it occurs alongside the Narina Trogon only in Kakamega Forest. Bar-tailed Trogon had been recorded in the Nairobi forests some fifty years ago, but none had been seen within the city limits since at least 1972.

Yet there it was. The group noticed that the head of the Bar-tailed Trogon was darker than Narina's and its chest bluer. The bird had less 'fancy eye make-up' than its commoner cousin. And the tail was barred.

Why was it in the Arboretum? It may have migrated from the highland forest in search of food during the cold season. Food was abundant in the Arboretum that day; we kicked up clouds of small brown moths as we walked through the grass. A number of birds migrate from the highlands to the Nairobi area during the cold months. In particular, Bronze-naped, and sometime Olive, Pigeons come to the Arboretum in July and August, then return to their highland homes.

The Bar-tailed Trogon did not stay, but it made that Wednesday Morning Birdwalk a very special day! — *Fleur Ng'weno, P O Box 42271, Nairobi*

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* at Mida Creek

At around 10:00 on 11 March 1997, having been watching waterbirds from the inland, Mida village side of Mida Creek together with Wellington Kombe of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides, I noticed a Wood Warbler moving through the mangrove bushes in company with numerous Willow Warblers. In fact, the mangroves fringing the creek were alive with small birds, mostly Willow Warblers, many of them in song. As we walked back towards the car, a bright warbler with a brilliant white belly caught my attention. A view in the binoculars confirmed my suspicion that it was a Wood Warbler. I pointed it out to Wellington and we both watched it for several minutes from about 6 m away (with Bausch & Lomb 10 x 42 binoculars in my case) as it moved through the mangroves and finally out of sight. It was a fairly large *Phylloscopus*, clearly a little larger than the accompanying Willow Warblers. Upperparts were a bright green, belly a clean white, with the throat and breast sulphur yellow. Wings relatively long with pale green edging. Head and face patterned as in most *Phylloscopus* with obvious yellow supercilium and dark eye. Legs appeared pinkish. Its behaviour was much like the Willow Warblers as it moved through the branches feeding, though it was chased by individual Willow Warblers on two occasions.

While I thought it was unusual to see a Wood Warbler on the coast I didn't at the time realise how rare it was. The only obvious confusion species (to me) seemed to be Green-capped Eromomela, an African species I have not seen. However, although the illustration in *Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania* (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1996) looks quite like a Wood Warbler, the text states that the coastal race has a pale yellow belly, thus excluding it in my view. The jizz of the bird I saw was perfect for Wood Warbler and unlike the Yellow-bellied Eromomela I saw at Lake Baringo. No other *Phylloscopus* has the distinctive combination of striking white belly and bright sulphur throat. — *Richard Gregory, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, UK*

Arrival of the Yellow Wagtails: The tribulations of an amateur birdwatcher

On 4 October 1997, during World Birdwatch '97, Andrew Walker and I were walking about on a large grassland adjacent to the grounds of St Andrew's School in Turi (0°10'S, 35°25'E at 2,700 m altitude). We were hoping to bag some plovers and pipits, chats and widowbirds for the count. The field was empty, there was hardly a bird about save some starlings and crows in the distance and a very handsome young Augur Buzzard on a dead tree.

It was overcast, the cloud base being barely 2,000 feet, it was cold and windy and we were wondering whether it would rain. It was about 3 pm when we saw a flock of birds approaching from the north-east. We were unable to make out what they were, but they were flying in a straight line towards us, forming a dense cloud. At first they were high, but then they started to spiral down and now resembled a swarm of bees. We could count about a hundred but then there was another and yet another flock, maybe as many as five altogether and the birds descended and landed all around us. They were Yellow Wagtails! Just where we stood, suddenly there were wagtails everywhere, at one time as many as one to every four or so square meters, and they were very tame, not bothered by us, eagerly feeding and chasing each other. Among them was a single Northern Wheatear that we thought may have arrived in the company of the wagtails — or was attracted by them, for it surely was not there before!

More and more wagtails kept arriving and soon the whole field was covered with them.

We are not wagtail specialists, but even to our amateur eye, it was obvious that the flock consisted of several races: some were very yellow, others rather grey, others again had a greenish tinge. Some had very marked eye stripes, yet others had much dark on the head and face (black or perhaps very dark blue).

We had Van Perlo's guide with us but had not lugged along the heavier books. Van Perlo on Plate 61 shows seven races. We had around us at least three if not four of these: certainly, *flava* and *thunbergi*, probably *lutea* and *beema*, possibly *superciliosus* (transposed in Van Perlo: 'g' and 'f' being mixed up).

We had other things to do: birdwatch duty was calling so after a while we left the field and the wagtails.

So our observation can be summarized thus: we witnessed the arrival of a compound flock consisting of several races of Yellow Wagtails on a field in Turi where up to that moment there was not a single wagtail.

The verification of the observation requires arduous book work. Britton's *Birds of East Africa* confirms that Yellow Wagtails can be seen in the Kenyan rift valley up to 3,000 m altitude from September to April, that they may frequent cultivation and open bushland and that various races occur, including *flava* and *thumbergi* (and *flava-thunbergi* intermediates!), that *superciliosus* has been caught in Nairobi, and that *lutea* and *beema* are more likely to be seen in the east of the country.

But where do all these wagtails come from and, if the various races are allopatric in their breeding areas, where do they join up?

My Collins photographic guide of birds of Britain and Europe contains five photographs of yellow wagtails. Three of these (nos 518, 519 and 520) we have seen at Turi but these photographs are difficult to match up with the Van Perlo pictures. The nearest one gets is to confirm *flava* and *thunbergi* and *feldegg*. The text (page 583-4) says that *flavissima* is the British race, *feldegg* breeds in the Balkans and that, in any case, in winter plumage all yellow wagtails look more or less alike.

But in Turi they did not look alike!

In *Birds of Africa* (Keith, Urban & Fry, Vol. IV) pages 198-202 are devoted to the Yellow Wagtails. Eleven races and three hybrid populations are to be chosen from but it is said that in winter plumage they are difficult to distinguish. However on plate 11 several non-breeding plumages are shown among the many breeding ones. Studying the pictures together with the text we can confirm *flava* and *thunbergi* now with certainty but there are no pictures and no description of the *flava/thunbergi* hybrids.

As to the home ranges, this book gives "Central Europe east to the Urals" for *flava* and "Norway East to Northern Siberia" for *thunbergi*. It does say that the two intergrade.

Going back to my old Mackworth-Praed and Grant *Handbook of African Birds* (where all the *Motacilla flava* races are still treated as different *Budytes* species) I find that the little migration maps do admirably correspond to the various data found in the other volumes.

Finally, I looked up the matter in our new bible, Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson's *Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania*. Here I found on page 506 corroboration for the likelihood of *flava* and probability for *beema* and *lutea* but I also found new information: namely that in first winter coat most yellow wagtails look like females and that all of them have much white in their feathers. Plate 69 shows various plumages, including some in winter but there is nothing about hybrids and their looks.

But none of the books I perused tells us where the races we saw at Turi (and they were three, if not four, even giving allowance for dimorphic females) may have joined: did they cross the Middle East together or did they rendezvous somewhere in the Rift — perhaps only a few kilometers from Turi? — *Imre Loefler, P O Box 47964, Nairobi*

Shining Sunbird —*Edwin Selempo*

Threatened birds of Kenya
10: Williams's Lark *Mirafra williamsi*

Don Turner
P O Box 48019, Nairobi

It was only in June 1955 that the late John G. Williams (former curator of birds at the Coryndon, now National, Museum of Kenya) came across, and later collected a new species of lark on the south-western slopes of Mt Marsabit in northern Kenya.

In 1956, J. D. Macdonald of the Natural History Museum in London, duly named the bird Williams's Lark *Mirafra williamsi,* and today it remains one of the least known of Kenya's endemic bird species. It lives in the most inhospitable of habitats — rocky lava desert with sparse grass cover and low *Barleria* shrubs, and with temperatures often in excess of 35°C.

Williams's Lark —*Edwin Selempo*

Like so many others of the family, Williams's Lark has few distinguishing features, other than its heavy, pale pink or brownish-grey bill. The general colour of its upperparts varies from rufous to deep vinous-brown or blackish, matching the red or black soils and lava rocks of its barren sub-desert habitat.

Two colour morphs occur, the more common one rufous, with rufous-brown ear-coverts and pectoral patches, the other a dark blackish morph with sides of face and pectoral patches blackish-chestnut. The lower throat and breast in both forms is mottled or spotted with dark brown or chestnut, becoming pale buffish on the lower belly and under tail coverts. The primaries are boldly rufous-edged, often forming a long and fairly conspicuous panel on the closed wing. Most individuals also show a fairly prominent buffy or rufous-buff supercilium which joins a whitish post-auricular area.

Williams's Lark is highly secretive at all times, scuttling almost rodent-like as it feeds among rocks and low *Barleria* shrubs. It rarely perches above ground other than on low rocks or stones, where it generally stands high to escape the often searing-hot substrate. Although rarely taking flight, males do display briefly at sunrise, in a slow, jerky, and somewhat laboured song-flight, uttering a sharp 'tsur-SREET' call note with each forward flap of their broad wings.

Throughout its disjunct range in the Dida Galgalla Desert and to the northeast of Isiolo from the Shaba National Reserve to Garba Tula District, it occurs alongside the Masked Lark *Spizocorys personata*, and in several parts of its range both are relatively common and easily observed. Nevertheless to date, the nest, eggs and breeding biology of Williams's Lark remain totally undescribed, and as such offer opportunities to all ardent students of Kenyan ornithology to give due attention to this little known endemic of ours.

Van Perlo Corrections Corner no. 2

Compiled by Colin Jackson
P O Box 383, Watamu

The Collins *Illustrated Checklist to the birds of east Africa* by Ber van Perlo is a very useful addition to the field guides available for East Africa — but as pointed out in previous issues of *Kenya Birds*, it does contain quite a few mistakes in the text, plates and maps.

This is the second instalment of our 'corrections corner' that will draw attention to mistakes that book users discover — incorrect colours on the plates, text that is clearly wrong, wrong or mis-numbered maps, and so on. Note these errors in your copies to make the book more useful for your birding, and avoid

being misled into wrong identifications. If Collins ever puts out a second edition, perhaps these corrections will be taken into account as well.

There are probably more mistakes lurking out there — please send in details of any problems that you've noted, for our Corrections Corner no. 3!

Plate 73.15, Brown Parisoma.
Problem: Illustration shows bird with pale eye — it should be dark.

Plate 33.6, 7, & 8, African, Great and Common Snipe.
Problem: Text correctly states that Common and African Snipe are the same size and that Great Snipe is larger. However, illustrations show Common as being the largest and Great as the smallest.

Plate 37.11, Sooty Tern.
Problem: Illustration is again misleading in that this tern is significantly larger than species such as Common, Roseate and Lesser Crested Terns (the latter being incorrectly illustrated as almost half as large again).

Plate 69.11, African Yellow Warbler.
Problem: Crown illustrated as being nearly the same colour as mantle — should in fact be noticeably darker, which in fact is how its 'standard' name describes it: Dark-capped Yellow Warbler.

Plate 81.12, Amethyst Sunbird.
Problem: Illustration shows tail as being relatively long — it is in fact about half the length shown.

The art of the Bird Bottle

Kimbo Beakbane
P O Box 20, Kericho

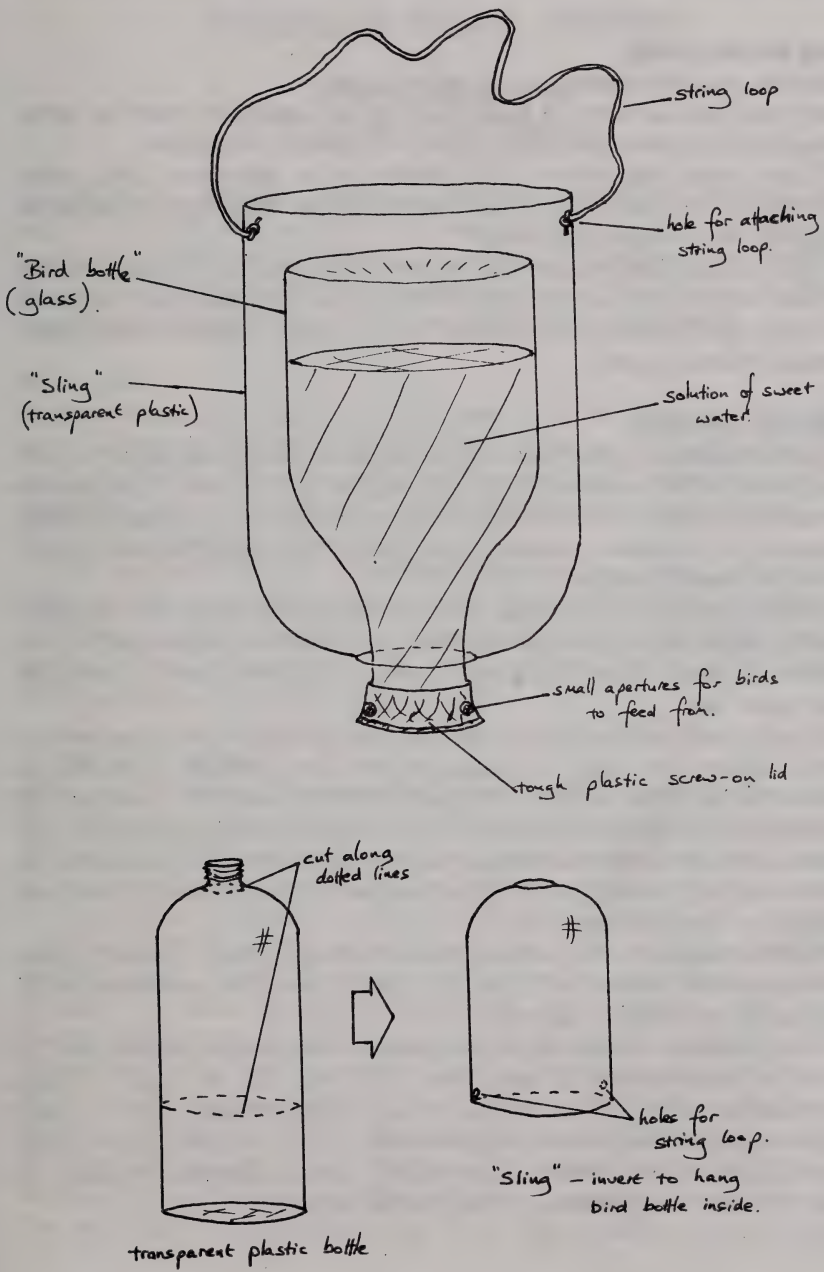
We've got Bird Tables, we've got Bird Baths — now add to the fun of your garden birds, while entertaining yourself and friends, with 'Bird Bottles'. This is a fascinating and easy way to introduce adults and children of any age to bird watching and recording.

What is a 'bird bottle'? Well, a bird bath is a shallow bowl of water for birds to drink and bathe in, a bird table is for providing (solid) food for birds, and a bird bottle is how you can provide *liquid* food in the form of sugar solution

('synthetic nectar', one could call it) for those birds which feed on that high-energy source of nutrition. A bird bottle is therefore designed to attract sunbirds in particular, but as you will find out if you try it yourself, a surprising diversity of species are lured to this simple, but effective, bird-attractor.

Like all good ideas the basic concept is very simple:

- Use a transparent glass bottle, which will be easy to clean and gives weight in windy conditions. I use 150 ml 'Kikkoman Soy Sauce' bottles — the flat, tough plastic screw-on lid, with two lateral holes, is ideal.
- You also need a one litre (transparent) plastic bottle, cut horizontally in two approximately one-third the way up from the base — discard the bottom section. Transparent materials are best for both bottles as it means that you can see when the liquid needs replenishing at a glance.
- Pierce two holes opposite each other and approximately 1 cm up from the cut edge of the top section of the plastic bottle. Through these, thread a piece of string, about 30 cm long, knotting it securely at each side, to create a longish loop.
- Next comes the tricky part: cut very carefully round the neck of the plastic bottle to leave an opening large enough, such that when the smaller, glass bottle is placed inside, its lid protrudes, but not so large as to allow it to fall out. This is the permanent 'sling' for the Bird Bottle. There will be many different ways to achieve this objective, but I prefer, after trial and error, this permanent sling — it is so easy, neat and functional. Accidental spillage of the liquid is avoided by careful cutting of the plastic sling and the weight of the glass Bird Bottle itself.
- Having decided on the site (for which see below), take a stout unbrushed stick, i.e. with small twigs/branches left uncut, making it very 'user friendly' by providing perches for birds, and secure the stake in position.
- Attach the string loop of the 'sling' to the stick — I use a form of water-proof sticky tape — ensuring that the sling hangs conveniently amongst the twigs.
- Fill the glass bottle with a solution of honey and water, sugar and water, or any such mixture you like, and secure the screw-on lid.
- Holding the sling in one hand, slide the now-filled glass bottle and gently let it hang upside-down (when the liquid needs replenishing reverse the process — holding the 'sling' in one hand, slide the glass bottle out, refill and slide it in again).
- Then sit back and let the fun begin!


string loop
hole for attaching string loop.
"Bird bottle" (glass).
"Sling" (transparent plastic)
solution of sweet water.
small apertures for birds to feed from.
tough plastic screw-on lid
cut along dotted lines
transparent plastic bottle
holes for string loop.
"Sling" – invert to hang bird bottle inside.

Siting the Bird Bottle

'If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again'.

My most popular sites are those which are surrounded by plants or scrub, giving the birds cover. Open sites tend to be avoided by all species.

I have found that placing Bird Bottles on or adjacent to bird tables, particularly if they have fruit, attracts swarms of bees. Away from the tables the occasional bee presents no problem.

Using an unbrushed stake to hold the Bird Bottle, instead of a plant, shrub or tree, allows for more flexibility when choosing or moving sites. The twiglets are also ideal for perching and queuing — yes, birds obviously knew about 'queuing' before we did!

A few tips and hints

For a more dramatic effect food colourings can be used in the liquid — reds, oranges and yellows seem to be the most popular with the birds. Light green is tolerated, but dark greens and blues are rejected. Any plain, un-sugared water, whether it be colourless, coloured, tap or filtered, surprisingly is also rejected, even in the hottest weather.

With prolonged usage the glass bottle can become encrusted, but it's easy to scrub the inside clean by using an old tooth brush and some bicarbonate of soda dissolved in water. When the 'sling' becomes discoloured throw it away and make a new one.

If a note book and biro are left near the site(s), together with a large bottle of (your) solution for rapid replenishing of the Bird Bottle(s), it encourages everyone to participate actively. Very quickly a Bird Bottle Diary emerges, full of interesting and amusing anecdotes, lists of species, strange sightings etc. and becomes a useful and permanent data source from which much information can be extracted, e.g. breeding records, confirmation of resident status in your area, monthly species movements, etc.

With the constant activity around the well-sited Bird Bottle, 'birding' parents of babes and/or toddlers will find it a great source of amusement while germinating the 'birding' bug early.

I am constantly besieged with the question 'what solution do you use'? To which the only answer is, once more, 'Try, try, and try again'! I have experimented with cane sugar, local honey, imported honey, glucose, pure glycerine, plain water, various combinations of two or more of the above, varying dilutions with water, colours added, natural coloration or plain. The birds will show their preference — and the fun is endless.

Ringing at Ngulia, 1997/98

Graeme Backhurst
P O Box 15194, Nairobi

The effects of *el niño* had a dominating influence on the weather in Kenya at the end of 1997 and early in 1998. The composition of the catch of Palaearctic migrants at Ngulia was also affected. Nevertheless, the total number of migrants ringed (17,232) was actually the third highest ever. For the first time, the Ngulia Ringing Group was joined by two teams of Earthwatch participants.

First period

Nairobi recorded 200 mm of rain in October 1997 and Tsavo was very green when an advance team arrived on 31 October. However, the only migrant seen during the 50-km drive through the park was a single Spotted Flycatcher. No wheatears, shrikes or swallows — a decidedly odd situation and a warning, as it turned out, of things to come!

The new moon night of 31 October/1 November was misty, with no birds. Three 60-foot nets set from just before dawn on 1st produced just a Sprosser and a Whitethroat. The following three nights, even with mist and showers on two, resulted in only 36 migrants caught. For comparison, 29, 30 and 31 October 1995 produced a total of 248 migrants ringed.

Second, main period

When Ngulia Ringing Group members drove in on 22 November they judged the vegetation to be some three weeks ahead of normal with impressive flowering of *Thunbergia holstii*. Good mist, and often very heavy rain, featured on most dates until 6 December, but bird numbers were lower than expected.

The species composition was also odd. Marsh Warbler was, as usual, dominant (7,276 ringed, the second highest ever), followed by Sprosser (2,870) and Whitethroat (2,406). The historically fourth most-ringed species, the River Warbler, only made 6th place during this period (225), trailing behind Red-backed Shrike (277, second highest yearly total) and Willow Warbler (237). Many of the 'minor' species were way down on expected numbers; for instance, there were only 40 Barn Swallows ringed, 34 Red-tailed Shrikes, eight Eurasian Nightjars (and one in the first period), seven Rufous Bush Chats, 19 Basra Reed, 14 Olivaceous and ten Upcher's Warblers. Compensations were few. Olive-tree Warblers were surprisingly plentiful (141) and, proportionately, slightly above the percentage in any previous year. There were scarcely any rarely-caught

Pied Wheatear —*Edwin Selempo*

species: two Asian Lesser Cuckoos, one Eurasian Cuckoo, and one Whinchat. Over the years, Common House Martins have often been seen over Ngulia, even sitting on the buildings, but hitherto have never been caught. A concerted effort this year using a tape lure in front of the dining room resulted in 29 being ringed.

Third period

The Lodge was manned from 23 December to 5 January by National Museums of Kenya personnel and Earthwatch volunteers. Many of the nights were misty but, as often seems to happen towards the end of the migration, bird numbers were very variable. Nevertheless, 3,082 migrants were ringed, although the number of species was only 18. Once more Marsh Warbler was top (1,436), with Common Whitethroat now in second place (1,159); Sprosser, true to form, was down to 251, followed by River Warbler in its 'true' fourth position (98). The sole unusual migrant caught was a Eurasian Cuckoo on 3 January.

Weights

With a good deal of torrential rain, the catch of 30 November contained a high proportion of very fat birds, with Marsh Warblers up to 17.2 g, Whitethroat to 20.0 g, Willow Warbler to 12.5 g, and Sprosser to 33.4 g. In the third period, heavy birds predominated throughout with Marsh up to 18.2 g, River to 23.5 g, Whitethroat to 20.5 g, and Sprosser to 32.0 g.

Visible migration and sightings

In early November there was a light southerly passage of Sooty Falcons, with birds passing during the morning and afternoon, plus one sitting in light rain on a dead tree in front of the lodge at 04:45 on 4th. There were several sightings of Amur Falcons (up to 200) in late November, and a male flew round for a few seconds at high speed at night on 30th before alighting on a dead tree where it remained in torrential rain and superbly visible for the next half hour. There were a few Booted Eagle sightings in late November, a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk on 5 December and a Corncrake on 1st.

Afrotropicals

The Afrotropical ringing total was the second highest at 797, but did include 205 Red-billed Quelea. No less than twelve species were new for the ringing list, pride of place going to an Allen's Gallinule lifted off the top of one of the manicured bushes just over the verandah wall at night on 30 November, immediately after a magnificent Mottled Swift had been picked up from the ground of the open verandah! The Mottled Swift had last been caught in 1972. Nightjars were very scarce indeed, only 12 Plain and one Dusky being ringed. Several other species which sometimes feature in nocturnal movements were not caught at all (e.g., Common Button Quail, kingfishers, Golden Pipit, African Paradise Flycatcher, and Red-capped Robin-Chat). Larks, though, were 'well' represented: three individuals of three species — Singing Bush Lark, Red-winged Lark and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark — but no Friedmann's Larks

which were, however, singing in an area of recently burnt grass some 35 km to the west.

Earthwatch

Manpower was considerably augmented this year by the presence of two Earthwatch contingents. Earthwatch enables volunteers to participate in and provide support to research projects around the world. In the second period we hosted a group of ten Earthwatch Fellows from several African countries, and in the final period ten volunteers from the UK and USA. The mix of different nationalities, together with the mix of nationalities of regular NRG members, worked smoothly together.

Recoveries and controls

The total numbers of recoveries and controls of birds caught at Ngulia now stands at 2 Afrotropicals and 94 Palaearctics. During the current season's catching there was only a single control, a Marsh Warbler from the eastern German Hiddensee ringing scheme; it had been ringed in Thüringen in June 1993. During 1997 a further 13 recoveries were notified. They were an interesting bunch: a Harlequin Quail to Soroti, NW Uganda; no less than five Sprossers, of which three were to the North Sinai area of Egypt (the other two were to Russia); an Olive-tree Warbler to the lower Zambezi River in Mozambique; and six Marsh Warblers to the Middle East and Europe. It is likely that the Harlequin Quail and the Olive-tree Warbler are the first recoveries of these species anywhere.

We heard in April 1997 that the River Warbler we controlled at Ngulia in December 1996 had been ringed in Slovakia in May 1994, and this too is probably the first long-distance recovery for the species.

In the second period there were three retraps of birds ringed at Ngulia in previous seasons. All were Marsh Warblers, two from November 1995, both retrapped twice this season, and one from December 1996. There were no previous-season retraps in the other two periods.

Acknowledgements

Thanks as always to all the ringing team (57 strong this year, including the Earthwatch contingent!), to Kenya Wildlife Service and the Ngulia Lodge management, and to the Wetland Trust, British Airways Assisting Conservation and Earthwatch for vital financial help.

In memoriam
Gurner Cunningham-van Someren, 1913-1997

'Chum' van Someren, Ornithologist Emeritus of the National Museums of Kenya and for many years Curator of the bird collection, died in August 1997. The following tribute to Chum is part of an address delivered by Ian Parker at a memorial gathering in September 1997.

"Van Someren is a Dutch name. In the last century, however, a family of Van Somerens became British. By the time that Vernon (or V.G.L. as he was known) van Someren joined the British East Africa Protectorate Medical Service in 1910, these van Somerens were Cunningham-van Somerens and as Scottish as Meinertzhagen was English. Gurner (or Chum) Cunningham van Someren was the first of seven children born to Vernon and Elizabeth van Someren, and outlived them all.

As a good Scot, Chum was educated at Herriott Watts and attended an agricultural college. One of his first undertakings on returning to Kenya in 1933 was to build the house he lived in for the rest of his life, here on Miotoni. His early employment was varied. Among many things, he laid the original Karen Estates water pipelines and helped build the Karen golf course. As an employee of the Nairobi Municipal Council's Health Service, he was briefly Nairobi's head rat catcher.

Chum was a gregarious and sociable young man who played tennis and golf (according to his wife, he had a terrible slice), enjoyed bird shooting, was a keen fisherman, and had a fine singing voice that he was not shy of using. He was also slightly eccentric. He always dressed formally for dinner — black tie and dinner jacket - insisting that his servant also be formally attired in white kanzu, red cummerbund and fez. Nothing was allowed to upset the ritual — even when as a lone bachelor the meal was no more than fish and chips. In later years flashes of this eccentricity reappeared in nonsense songs rendered in full voice while capering on the beach at Watamu in the dead of night.

Late in the 1930s he joined Pest Control, a Quin Geering company that was the forerunner of Fisons. With the exception of war service in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Ethiopia and Somaliland — where he worked on mosquito control — he was to stay with the Company for the rest of his official working career. In 1938 he met Eleanor MacDonald,

whom he married in 1940. Fisons, and even more, Eleanor, steadied Chum somewhat: as employers and wives usually do.

Eleanor MacDonald was born in Uganda, but educated in Scotland. Aged 18 and having passed her Scottish 'highers' she returned to East Africa. Joining the Medical Research Laboratories and despite no formal training, she was quickly established as a technician in the pathology section. Later she switched to entomology, which became her forte, and she developed into a world authority on African mosquitoes. In recognition she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Brunel University. Not only was Eleanor Chum's loving helpmate, but her first-class brain kept up with and stimulated his own scientific research.

After the war Chum grew a beard, did not sing as much as he once had and Eleanor presented him with two sons. The three phenomena may or may not have been connected. Chum loved his sons and enjoyed them and their company immensely. Yet he was not a 'good father' in the modern sense, believing that rearing children was a wife's job.

Eleanor did not like Chum's beard particularly, but conceded that — jet black, neatly clipped and fulsome — it was a handsome beard in as far as beards go. Chum was quite vain about it. Between 1963 and 1968 he had to spend three months a year on the Gezira cotton project in Sudan. The Sudanese won Chum's heart in several ways, but especially through their admiration for his beard. As people with a fine eye for such things, this tickled his vanity no end. From his Sudan days onward, Chum refused to trim his beard again. The fine black growth evolved into the wild greying, prophet's growth we all knew in latter times.

In his career Chum van Someren was a hard-working company man who concentrated upon insect pests, but could turn his hand to anything, going further than most company men would hold reasonable. Many of the experiments on plants undertaken for Fisons were carried out on his own property here at Miotoni. Characteristically, when he did something, he undertook it without reservation, throwing everything into finding the right answer.

Then there was the other Chum: van Someren the naturalist. In this he followed his eminent father's footsteps. With a Victorian's insatiable curiosity, throughout his life he was fascinated by nature and never ceased to marvel at the life about him. Over the years he became a veritable encyclopaedia, not only on Africa's natural history, but the whole planet's. And he gave out his knowledge freely and enthusiastically. Anyone who asked was given whatever he knew in full measure.

Chum was a compulsive note taker and diarist. He wrote many papers, though they were fewer than he might have produced, given the

information at his disposal. He did not write up all his material because his primary interest was discovery and not reporting. He was one of those whose interest was *doing* and not *the fame of having done.*

After a professional career dominated by entomology, when Chum left Fisons he became the National Museum's ornithologist. When he retired for the second time, the Museum made him Ornithologist Emeritus. While he loved all nature, his work with birds pleased him best and gave him greatest satisfaction. He, and his father V.G.L. van Someren, were outstanding naturalists, contributing more than any other two men to East Africa's ornithology and entomology this century.

Chum was a man who could have, some would say should have, been better known than he was. He was charitable, liked people and had a loving family. Without question he benefited his fellow humans, lived a long and happy life, and shared this happiness with others. His time was well used. He is now gone. That he be mourned is inevitable and right. Yet it was the nature of the man to prefer being remembered, not with a tear, but a smile between friends with noggins in hand, recalling incidents past. A formal funeral was not his style. He was not religious. Chum marvelled at Nature, saw it as a grand act of creation and mystery immensely beyond human comprehension — which is where he left it."

***Leon Bennun adds*:** "I first met Chum 'properly' only in the early 1980s. His wild, white beard, flashing spectacles and no-nonsense manner were intimidating to a degree, especially to a neophyte ornithologist rather lacking in self-confidence. While Chum's enormous knowledge of East African natural history was immediately apparent, it took longer to appreciate his willingness to share that knowledge with whoever asked, his passionate concern for and love of nature, and his fundamental kindness as a person. Chum made enormous contributions to ornithology in Kenya, and to the Museum in particular — including starting the forerunner of *Kenya Birds,* 'Museum Avifauna News'. His interest in the Ornithology Department continued long after his retirement as Ornithologist Emeritus. While he rarely made a personal appearance, letters in his distinctive, elegant, looped handwriting appeared on my desk at frequent intervals after I took over the running of the Department. These often contained quite pointed criticisms — Chum was rarely shy to make his professional feelings known. However, such comments were never made gratuitously, but out of genuine concern for the proper approach in matters ornithological (and they undoubtedly helped to keep us on our toes!) Chum was an immense reservoir of wisdom and knowledge; his passing, after a long and very productive life, in many ways marks the end of an era in Kenyan ornithology. As we look towards an uncertain and challenging future, he will be greatly missed."

Events and Announcements

Coming soon! Important Bird Areas in Kenya, to be published by the EANHS, identifies, maps and describes 60 critical conservation sites and the key bird species they contain. For pre-publication information, contact the EANHS office.

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks continue weekly. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

The East Africa Natural History Society offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus and organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 749957, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday 09:30 to 15:30.

National Birdmap. The Ornithology Department's biogeographic database needs YOUR bird records!! For your free National Birdmap checklists, contact the Department.

Birding Hotline! Phone the EANHS on Nairobi 749957 to hear the latest and to report any unusual records.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published by the EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee. Contact Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133).

African Bird Club. The ABC provides a worldwide focus for African ornithology and its colour Bulletin is second to none. For membership details, write to the Kenyan ABC representative: Colin Jackson, P O Box 383 Watamu (e-mail cj-jacko@bigfoot.com)

Regional birding groups are now active in Kakamega, Kinangop, Mombasa, Naivasha and Watamu, among other places. For information and addresses, contact Solomon Ngari at the EANHS.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme. For information and cards, contact Joseph Oyugi at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya (address below).

CONTACTS: For *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, e-mail kbirds@africaonline.co.ke or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For the EANHS and its Bird Committee, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049, or e-mail eanhs@africaonline.co.ke.

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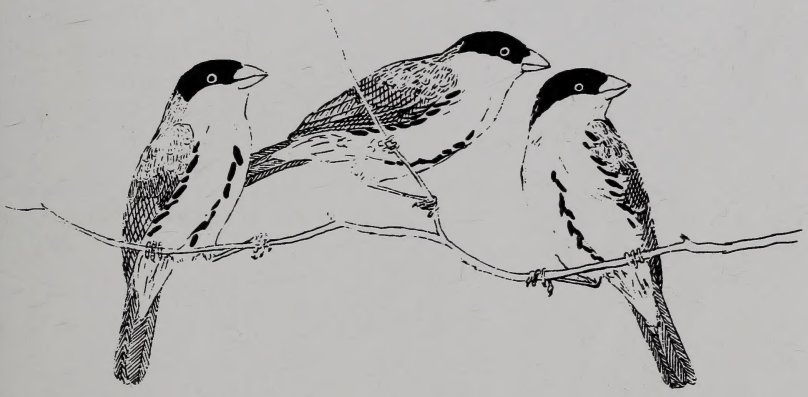

Black-capped Social Weavers by Edwin Selempo — one of the illustrations for the upcoming EANHS book, "Important Bird Areas in Kenya' (see p. 92). This species is characteristic of the Somali-Masai biome in Kenya

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